

# Divorce in the Arab Region: Current Levels, Trends and Features

Somaya M. El-Saadani<sup>1</sup>

## I. Introduction

Marriage in the Arab societies is the only socially and religiously approved context for sexuality and parenting. Marriage is not a simple agreement between the couple but rather, it is an agreement “marriage” between the families of the couple. With this regard, marriage of the groom and bride is surrounded by great attention of their respective families and by many regulations, formal procedures, and rituals to guard against its failure. Yet, marriage failure occurs.

Failure of marriage has many ramifications on both the partners (with disproportionate suffering) and the children (if produced children). The burden is huge on the divorced individuals especially women who are stigmatized in the Arab societies and acquire poor image. I’m quoting a paragraph of the autobiography of a distinguished Moroccan writer which provides a quite clear idea how the society set eyes on the divorced individuals. “It was said – according to what has been kept in the memory of our friend, during his early childhood, ...It is in that time, around dawn time, when women return carrying water from water shields upper the hill and men go out washing for praying, one day, by chance or by prior arrangement that it happened quickly and secretly at one corner of the street, what could always happens between a man and a woman of prohibited sexual affairs...The truth is, this type or another of sexual affairs ... occurs very rarely, it is almost confined among some divorced men and women”, (El-Gabry, M. Abed, 1997, p:28-29, in Arabic). Divorced women become vulnerable group of people who lacks support; emotionally, socially, and financially and suffers loss of their freedom and dignity (they subject to the authority of their fathers, mothers, and brothers). Divorce of partners, especially the women represents a crisis, where women’s success in life is identified in terms of their success of marriage stability. Women’s success in their working career is inferior to their marriage and does not compensate for their marriage failure. One significant proverb in the Egyptian culture that symbolizes the pivotal role of marriage is saying: “The shadow of a wall is no better than the shadow of a man”. Such sentence teaches us that a woman would accept marrying to any one even if his sole role is not better than providing her a shadow. This is a much preferred option than living in celibacy or divorce. This concept is additionally reflected in the willingness of women (especially the divorced and the old celibate ladies) to be second wife in polygamy marriages.

The Arab countries examined can not be considered a homogenous group in terms of the many demographic, health, socio-economic, and human welfare and rights indexes. As an example, Table 1.1 in the Annex, we are studying countries with population size takes value as low as half a million to a country with population size of 68 millions.

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<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, Department of Demography and Biostatistics, Institute of Statistical Studies and Research, Cairo University.

Furthermore, although they share common language, culture and religion that strongly influence many of their social norms, values and attitudes and most importantly their family building structure and family breakup which is our interest, they are different with regard to their efforts to subject divorce and its consequences to judicial acts. In the majority, repudiation is only the husband's right<sup>1</sup>. No restrictions have been imposed upon the husband's will nor on his polygamy (as long as he has not exceeded maximum four wives at any time). In few others, notably; Algeria, Egypt, Syria, and Tunisia, there have been efforts of different strengths (some goes back to the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and others are very recent) to put restrictions on repudiation and polygamy. In Syria (1917 and 1975) and Tunisia (1956) divorce became an issue of the court. In Egypt (1920, 1929) a divorced woman can apply for an alimony due by her ex-husband and for child custody. In Tunisia (1956) and Egypt (2000) divorce became the right of the both sexes. Polygamy is restricted in Syria (1975) and is denied in Tunisia (1956) and became a justified reason for an Egyptian wife to ask for divorce, (for more details, see for example, Fargues (2003, p:259-262).

When one tries to study marital instability in the region one faces dearth of research literature and in the same time dearth of data. With this regard one is not alone. Other scholars who look to study many other topics in our region (except fertility and mortality to some extent) face the vicious circle of scarce data and research. Our region suffers from lack of the basic information and lack of any systematic studies on marital instability, its levels and trends, its causes, characteristics, and consequences. Fraught with these problems, and mainly dearth of appropriate data, this Chapter reports on a cross-cultural estimation of the current and past levels and trends of marital instability in some Arab countries and the characteristics of women who have gone through divorce for those countries for which data are available.

We used two different sources of data: a time series of vital statistics on marriage and divorce that have been published in the United Nations Demographic Yearbooks since 1970s. This is to obtain estimates of the levels and trends over time. The second source includes the latest national demographic surveys that have been conducted in these countries (i.e., Demographic and Health Surveys, Maternal and Child Health surveys, World Fertility Surveys).

With regard to the published vital statistics, we expect that the events of marriage, divorce and remarriage are complete since the legalities of such events are very important to the Arab families. However, the published tabulations are insufficient to study thoroughly marriage instability. On the other hand, with regard to the national surveys data we expect that if they suffer from any bias it would be under-reporting. We expect that some women in our societies still fail to report that they are currently divorced (at time of the survey taking) or previously divorced. We have, however, limited capacity from the available literature to assess the magnitude and direction of such biases and whether there are socioeconomic differentials in the likelihood of women's self-report of divorce. Furthermore, because the available surveys are concerned mainly with studying fertility and family planning behavior of the women and all its related issues, their data are secondary for studying in-depth marital disruptions and its characteristics. Nevertheless, it allows individual-level analysis of a number of important related factors. And we regard this step as a essential towards more deep, rigorous and radical analysis in a realm of scarce and disturbed knowledge of the topic.

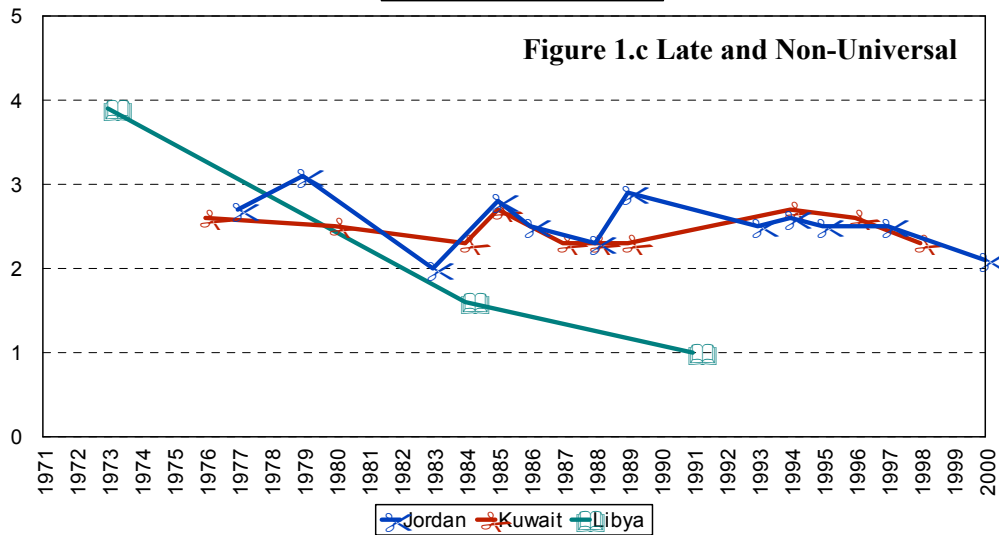
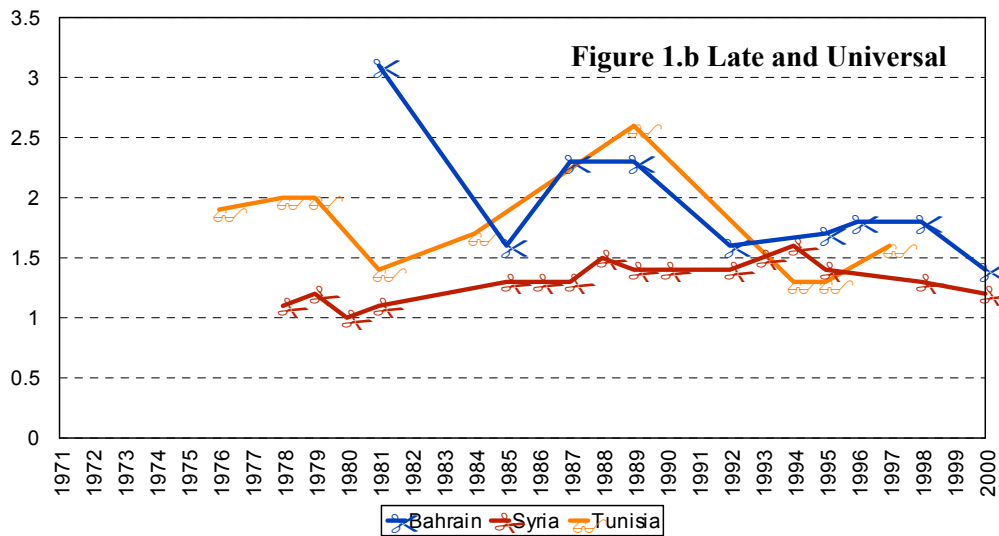
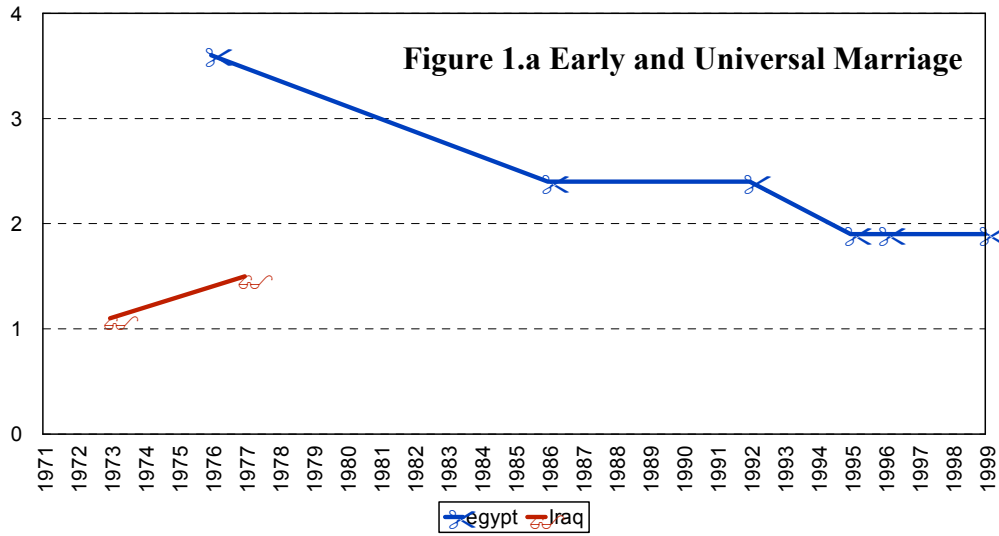
The Chapter is divided into two main sections. Section one provides estimates of the levels and trends of divorce in some Arab countries. Section two provides a thorough description of the divorced women, mainly; some of their demographic and social-economic characteristics, for which data are available.

## **II. Levels and trends of divorce in the Arab region**

What are the past and current levels and trends of divorce in the region? And what are the future trends? Based on the Vital Statistics that made available by the United Nations series of the Demographic Yearbook a time series data on the general divorce rates and number of divorces per 100 marriages for Arab countries on which information are available are displayed in Figures 1, and 2 (below). The countries in these two Figures are grouped into three groups according to their stage of nuptiality transition as identified by Rashad and Osman (2003). As noted by Rashad and Osman (2003, p:22-26), the region has gone through noticeable changes in nuptiality pattern which may have an impact on the incidence of divorce. Many of the Arab countries had deviated from the non-European marriage pattern that is characterized by early and universal marriages. The authors identified three stages of nuptiality transition (in terms of marriage timing and marriage prevalence, UN, 1990). The first stage is remarked by early and universal marriage. Countries that still in this stage include Egypt, Oman and Yemen. Countries fall in the second stage (characterized by early and non-universal marriage) include Bahrain, Syria, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Sudan, United Arab Emirates and Saudi-Arabia. The third stage of nuptiality transition is of late and non-universal type of marriages. Arab countries that are identified in this stage include Lebanon, Kuwait, Jordan and Libya. Moreover, scholars found new forms of marriage patterns, in Egypt, within the domain of legal marriage (a marriage performed in conformity with the legal requirement of the Islam shariaa’): an increase in age-discrepant marriages with non-negligible percent of women older than their husbands and a non-negligible proportion of recent marriages are with education gap in favor of females. It is expected that such marriages will have undesirable results, (Osman and Shahd, 2003; Rashad and Osman, 2003).

Judged by the general divorce rate (number of divorces per 1000 persons 15 years and above), data show a consistent fall in the level in both Egypt and Libya (the former is member in the first stage of nuptiality transition group while the later is member of the third group), a declining trend, overall, in Bahrain and Tunisia after a peak in late eighties, a consistent rise in Syria with a recent decline by the end of the nineties but at a level higher than that at the beginning of the series. The general divorce rates in countries members of the third nuptiality transition stage reveal a general declining pattern in Jordan and Kuwait.

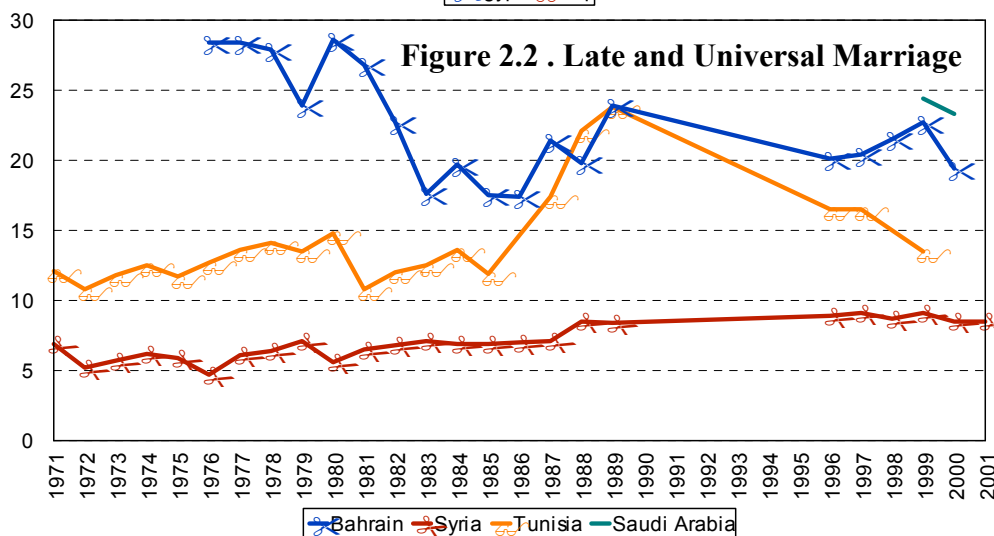
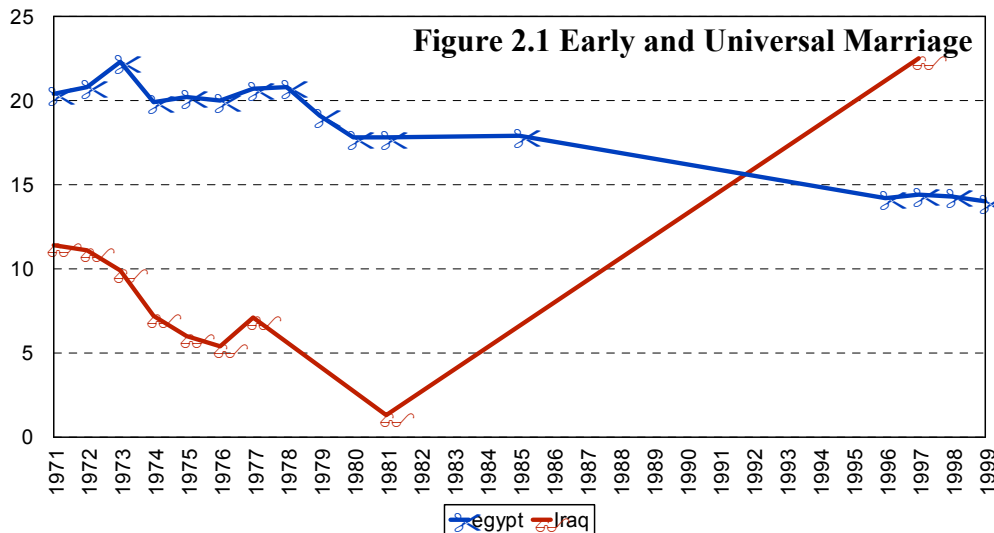
**Figure 1. General Divorce Rates in Some Arab Countries according to Nuptiality Transition Stage, (000)**

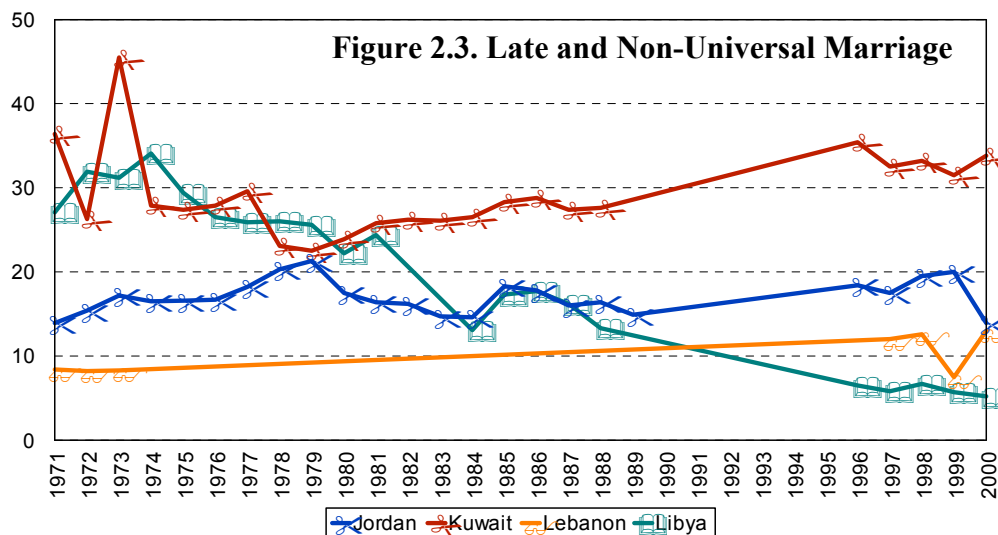


Yearly divorces per number of marriages, Figures 2.a, 2.b, 2.c, provide similar picture. They demonstrate a steady decrease in Egypt and Libya concurrent with a sharp rise in Iraq after a ten years of continuous and sharp decline. (Iraq suffers from political

unrest since 1980, the 1980 war with Iran followed by 1990 war with Kuwait). A general declining pattern in Bahrain and an almost rising trend in Tunisia (although there is an apparent fall in the last ten years) and a steady rise in Syria, both are members of the second nuptiality group. Results show upward trend in Kuwait and Lebanon, an almost stable pattern in Jordan, (Figure 2.3).

**Figure 2. Divorces per 100 Marriages in Some Arab Countries according to Nuptiality Transition Stage.**





Overall, most of the Arab countries under study but Syria are experiencing declining trend in the level of divorce. This has been also demonstrated by comparing the starting and ending points of the time series in each country, (Table 1, below),<sup>2</sup>

Table 1. Crude and General Divorce Rates and Number of Divorces per 100 Marriages in the Arab Countries according to the Stage of Nuptiality Transition

Countries	Crude Divorce Rate* (1)	General Divorce Rate** (2)	Divorce per 100 Marriages (3)
Egypt	2.09(1971) 1.17 (1999)	3.60(1976) 1.88 (1999)	20.4(1971) 14.0(1999)
Iraq	0.99(1971) 0.11 (1981)	-	-
Bahrain	1.31(1976) 1.25 (1999)	3.10(1981) 1.42 (2000)	28.4(1976) 19.4(2000)
Syria	0.52(1971) 0.73 (2000)	1.10(1978) 1.22 (2000)	6.9(1971) 8.5(2001)
Tunisia	0.88(1971) 0.94 (1999)	1.90(1976) 1.60 (1997)	12.1(1971) 13.5(1999)
Jordan	0.72(1971) 1.25 (2000)	2.70(1977) 2.08 (2000)	13.9(1971) 13.9(2000)
Kuwait	1.39(1971) 1.67 (2000)	2.60(1976) 2.31 (1998)	36.4(1971) 33.8(2000)
Libya	2.02(1971) 0.28 (2000)	3.90(1973) 1.03 (1991)	27.1(1971) 05.2(2000)

\*Per 1000 Population.

\*\* Per 1000 Population 15 years and over.

Source: compiled from United Nations Demographic Yearbooks.

Based on these nations' vital statistics there are two revelations. First, there is, in general, a declining trend in the level of divorce in the Arab countries under study, except Syria to some extent, irrespective of the stage of the nuptiality transition they experience. And second, the levels of divorce in these countries have no apparent pattern of association with their stages of nuptiality transition.

The several national demographic surveys that have been conducted in the region allow us estimating the level and trend of divorce (in about 10 to 20 years long) in terms of the number of divorced women, Table 2. (in the previous part the estimates were conducted with regard to the number of the divorce events). We estimated the group who ever divorced. i.e., the group who have ever experienced divorce at least once in their lifetime. This measure is based on data on the current marital status of women in the age group 15-49 and the number of marriages of each woman in their life up to the time of the interview<sup>3</sup>. We can conclude three points of importance from the data: 1) the Arab countries remarkably varies with regard to the prevalence level of divorce. The percent ever divorced takes value as low as 3.7 percent in Lebanon to level as high as 18 per cent in Morocco. 2) Those of high level of divorce show no scene for decline, e.g., Morocco, Sudan. While those who have low levels of divorce experience further declining trend, notably Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria. 3) The percent ever divorced is about three fold the percent currently divorced. This indicates that two thirds of the ever divorced women had a chance to remarry.

Table 2. Percent Distribution of Ever Married Women (15-49) by Current Marital Status

Countries	Year of the Survey	Currently Married	Currently Divorced*	Ever Divorced*
Early and Universal Marriage				
Egypt	WFS1980	91.2	3.3	11.5
	DHS2000	92.4	2.7	06.3
Late and Universal Marriage				
Tunisia	WFS1978	95.9	1.7	06.00
	DHS1988	95.9	2.0	04.72
Algeria	MCH92/93	92.2	3.7	13.04
Morocco	WFS1980	89.6	5.66	19.93
	DHS1995	90.6	5.9	18.31
Sudan	WFS	91.7	4.8	14.6
	MCH1993	90.4	5.9	14.2
Syria	WFS1978/79	96.1	1.2	04.5
	MCH1995	94.6	0.04	
Late and Non-universal Marriage				
Lebanon	MCH1996	94.5	02.4	3.7

\* Data include those who have declared that they are separated.

One point that deserves attention and to think through is that at the time when a noticeable decline in divorce is taking place, people feel that it is in the rise. Fargue (2003:258-259) argued that

“it is perhaps because it is more and more consequential for each of the individuals concerned. The reasons that make it increasingly tangible, restrictive legislation and a substantial cost for the man demanding divorce, have actually exercised a dissuasive effect on the phenomenon itself. The legal norm is somehow altering the statistical norm”.

We add further to this argument that each event of divorce has a story, a sad story inevitably be. And according to Potter (1999: 710) “People are likely to pay more

attention to negative events and information than to positive information and to be especially attuned to the occurrence of events that are both highly undesirable and not easily prevented” People have greater capacity to recall information on unhappy and disrupted marriages than those go uneventfully. Moreover, the stigma and social isolation that used to be attached to divorced individuals especially women is weakening. Divorced women are not as hiding their previous failed marriage as they were doing decades ago. Their natal families are not as ashamed and are concealing their divorced member from the public as used to do few decades ago and the more recent the time the more divorced women are participating in the public life.

Relying on statistics, in the recent times number of divorcees around that people are in touch with in day to day time is growing. This is because it includes not only those divorced this year (incident cases) or last year but also includes the divorcees (ever divorced) accumulating over time since at least three to four decades ago. The number of divorces in Egypt, for example, that took place since 1971 up to 1996 (span of 25 years) is close to two millions (1,913,318) and this represents 14.0% of ever married women at time of 1996 census (13,631,963) and amounts to 17% of the currently married women, i.e., about one per every five currently married women had ever divorced. The divorcees aged 15-35 in the year 1971, are most probably still alive, they would be of ages 40-60 at time of the 1996 Census. Going back in time to the year 1976, there were 450,615 events of divorce since 1971. This amounted to 4.3% of the ever-married women at that time and represented 6.8% of the currently married women (at time of the 1976 Census). The prevalence in 1996 was obviously about three fold that was in 1976.

***Future trends of divorce:*** Should we expect a reverse upward trend in divorce rates in the Arab region after this apparent decline? Based on the Western experience, Researchers, mainly sociologists, and commentators and the public are predisposed to expect rising trends. The rational behind is that the many facets of the socioeconomic development; including urbanization, modernization and industrialization, spreading and rising levels of education, the increasing rates of women’s participation in the labor market and the accompanying and interrelated changes in the societal traditional norms, and values that used to surround pattern of family formation and dynamics of the relationships within the household and the role of women in the society, all these forces together will lead to rising divorce rates as they did in the Western societies. How? The economic independence of women and their empowerment, their seeking for more share in decision –taking, in building and shaping the future of their families, seeking for more egalitarian relationship within the household, their increasing share in public life, all these will create conflicts, i.e., conflicts between the traditional patriarchal systems and the emerging women’s needs and aspirations for more egalitarian treatment in the household and society at large. Conflicts that may lead to stresses, tensions and divorce. Interestingly we notice that associated with these economic and social changes what we call the changing image of divorced women in the cultural sphere. In contrast to the not very distant past, divorce now in Western societies (and in the Arab societies to some extent) is not considered a social stigma and a source of social exclusion any longer<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, these cultural changes transformed the act of divorce to be an engine for further divorce. That is to say frequent divorce weakens the norm of marital stability. Divorce become a viable option to free bad matrimonial relationships, offspring imitate divorced parents; and the divorce of numerous friends makes the choice of divorce more normal and respectable, (Sills, 1972).



Yet, our findings and those of other scholars, e.g., for Algeria and Egypt (Fargues, 2003), Iran (Aghajanian, 1986) and South-East Asia; Malay and Indonesia (Jones, 1997, 1981) show that the Arab and Muslim countries stands in a sharp contrast with the Western ones. The two worlds experienced quite two opposite scenarios. Development in Western countries is associated with rising divorce rates (although the rates have leveled off in most cases) concurrently is associated with declining rates in our region. The gap in the level of development between the Western countries and the other countries (including South-eastern Asia) is with no doubt huge. The question that remains still unanswered, is whether a further rise in development will be associated with upsurge in the divorce rates, so that the relationship in our region will take U-shape pattern as has been observed in Taiwan and Japan (Lee, et. al, 1994; Rayme, et al., 2004). One interesting feature of the Japanese experience (currently is experiencing far unprecedented levels of industrialization and urbanization) is that the upsurge rate of divorce takes place at times when family formation system and values are still close to the Moslem's and Arabs', notably; informal cohabitation and non-marital child bearing have virtually absent.

### **III. Demographic and socio-economic profile of the divorced women**

Our study of the characteristics of the divorced females is limited to few numbers of traits. That is because the rich series of the demographic surveys that have been conducted in the region since late 1970s did not consider either the issue of nuptiality or marital stability. Hereby, we will provide demographic analysis on duration of marriage, age at first marriage, marriage cohort, place of current residence, and fertility/infertility. The socio-economic profile is limited to level of educational attainment and level of participation in the labor force.

*Duration of marriage:* Numerous studies consistently found that marriage dissolution is more likely to occur in the early years of marriage life, (Cherlin, 1977; Fargues, 2003; Jones, 1997; Platte, 1988; Smith, 1981). The longer the duration of marriage is, the lesser the probability of dissolution. Egypt vital statistics provide support for this pattern. As Table 3 (Cols. 2 and 3). reveals, around one third of the divorced women got divorce after a very short period of marriage duration, less than a year. This is evident in 1976 and 1996 Censuses (with 20 years apart). Above the majority (61.9% 59.2% in 1976 and 1996, respectively) had gotten divorce prior completing their third year of marriage. In all, close to three quarter of the divorced women their marriage did not survive to 5- year marriage duration. This high risk of divorce in early marriage life is further demonstrated by examining the rate of divorce (number of divorces that had occurred in 1996 per one hundred ever married women) according to marriage duration (Table 3, last Col.)<sup>5</sup>. The rate of divorce in the first five years is five fold higher than the rate among those their marriages lasted from 5-10 years.

“Whether the characteristics associated with short marriage durations at divorce are divorce-inducing characteristics?” We cannot answer this important question that has been addressed by (Cherlin, 1977, p). The available surveys' data in all the Arab countries do not provide information on duration of marriage of the dissolved marriages. This shortcoming impaired additionally, any analysis in which we should control for the duration of marriage<sup>6</sup>.

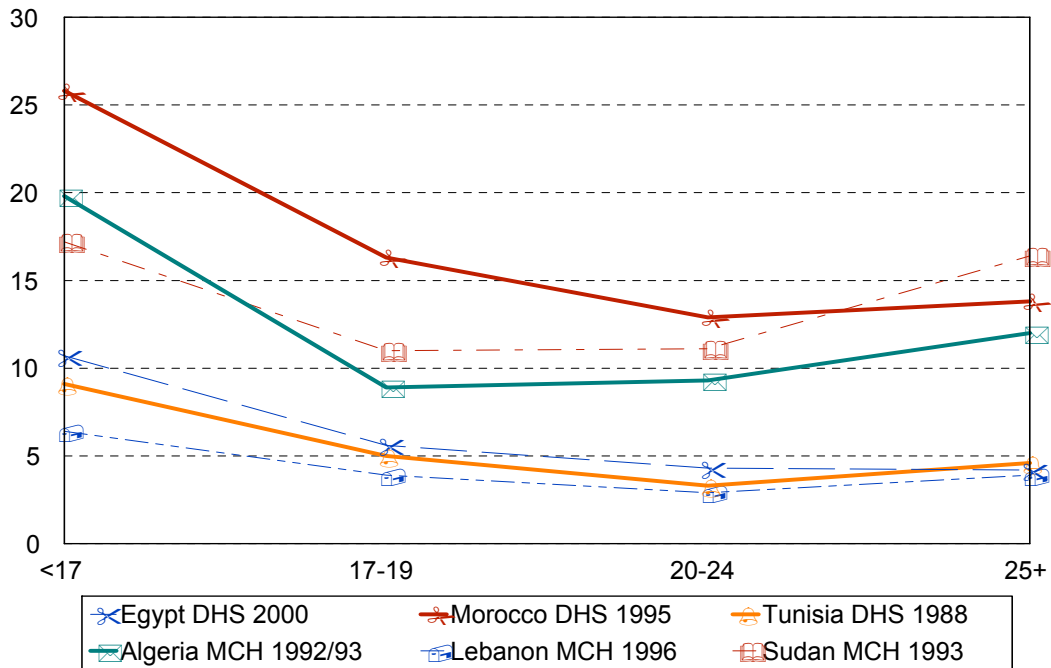
Table 3. Distribution of Number of Divorces and the Divorce rate according to Duration of Marriage, Egypt's Vital Statistics and 1996 Census

Duration of Marriage	Percent Distribution of Number of Divorces		Number of Divorces per 100 Ever Married Women
	1976	1996	
1<	32.9	36.0	← 4.72
1-	17.7	14.1	
2-	11.3	09.1	
3-	8.1	06.8	
4-	5.5	05.2	← 0.88
5-	4.5	03.9	
6-	3.0	03.0	← 0.19
7-	2.1	02.2	
8-	1.7	02.5	
9-	1.4	01.8	
10-	4.9	07.1	← 0.16
15-	2.3	03.5	
20+	4.5	04.7	
Mean	4.49	4.96	0.9
Total	78098	69219	

**Age at marriage:** In the majority of the Arab countries, early and teenage marriages are still prevalent. The percentage of women 15-49 whose first marriage was initiated at ages below 20 is above 50 per cent. (e.g., 60% in Egypt, 70% in Sudan, 53% in Jordan, 50% in Lebanon). Moreover, a range between 20% to 30% in most of them are getting married at ages 16 or less. Although the cultural forces behind teenage marriages in the West are completely different from those in the Muslim societies<sup>7</sup>, numerous studies indicated that the younger the age at marriage the higher the probability that a marriage terminates in separation or/and divorce, (Cherlin, 1977; Family Planning Perspectives, Digest, 1986; Goldman, 1981; Greenstein, 1990; Martin and Bumpass, 1989; McCarthy, et. al, 1979; Platte, 1988; Smith, 1981; Trent and South, 1989). In almost all the different cultures, literature found early marriages are at the highest risk of divorce. Presumably, individuals who marry early are less mature and spend less time in the marital search, (Trent and South, 1989). In addition, younger age at marriage is a well recognized correlate with high incidence of fetal loss and infertility, two prime causes of divorce in our region. Couples marrying, in contrast, at older age are expected to be more mature, spending more time in the marital search, bringing more material assets into the marriage than the younger couple and hence are making for more complications if they divorce, (Cherlin, 1977; Jones, 1997, 1981). Another significant argument is that adolescents' marriage, in recent decades, is associated with low socio-economic status and poor demographic performance of the couples; they tend to have lower educational attainment, are of low skilled labor, have lower income and assets, have higher fertility, shorter birth intervals, and higher infant mortality, are more likely to be living in extended family, etc.. as noted by (McCarthy et al, p:) "these socioeconomic forces which push them into early marriage are itself sufficient to ensure high break up rate". Moreover, their material costs of marriage and divorce are of trivial magnitude as compared with the better-off class.

Data demonstrate consistently high prevalence of divorce among teenage and early married women in all Arab countries under study, Figure 3. The prevalence of divorce among teenage marriages (<17) is the uppermost and is about two folds the level among those married at ages 20 or above. It sharply declines among the adjacent age group (17-19). The wider gap in the rate of divorce is between the first two age at marriage groups, less than 17 and 17-19. There is no remarkable differences afterwards. We observe, however, slight tendency toward rising levels of divorce among those initiated their marriage at ages 25 or above.

Figure 3. Prevalence of Divorce among Ever-Married Women (15-49) according to Age at First Marriage, (%)



**Marriage Cohorts:** When we examine levels and trends of divorce among ever married women aged (15-49) according to their marriage cohorts and their age at first marriage, results, Table 4., clearly demonstrate consistent declining trend over time (in comparison in a span of thirty years back in time) in almost all the six Arab countries under study. Moreover, they emphasize the previously found negative relationship between age at first marriage and the risk of divorce (Figure 3). Of special importance, those marriages that occur among females below age seventeen are at higher risk of breakup if compared to those who married at older age. This is particularly true for almost all the countries. Data also show that, particularly in Algeria, older marriages (i.e., marriages at ages 25 and above) may be at higher risk of divorce which makes the pattern of relationship between age at marriage and divorce takes a U-shape.

Table 4. Proportion Divorced among Ever Married Women (15-49) according to their Marriage Cohorts and Age at First Marriage

Age at First Marriage	Marriage Cohorts (First Marriage)							Total
	Egypt, DHS 2000							
	1995-2000	1990-1995	1985-1990	1980-1985	1975-1980	1970-1975	<1970	
<16	0.038	0.055	0.081	0.109	0.104	0.138	0.121	0.100
17-19	0.027	0.052	0.067	0.054	0.081	0.050	0.060	0.053
20-24	0.013	0.034	0.049	0.051	0.082	0.077		0.042
25+	0.022	0.036	0.063	0.062	0.019			0.041
Total	0.022	0.044	0.064	0.073	0.088	0.095	0.111	0.063
Age at First Marriage	Tunisia, DHS 1988							Total
	1983-1988	1978-1983	1973-1978	1968-1973	1963-1968	1958-1963	<1958	
	<16	0.030	0.019	0.160	0.096	0.069	0.083	
17-19	0.009	0.047	0.054	0.065	0.047	0.061	0.118	0.049
20-24	0.030	0.030	0.029	0.029	0.041	0.062		0.032
25+	0.022	0.061	0.063	0.043	0.045			0.045
Total	0.023	0.040	0.050	0.054	0.049	0.070	0.125	0.047
Age at First Marriage	Morocco, DHS 1995							Total
	1990-1995	1985-1990	1980-1985	1975-1980	1970-1975	1965-1970	<1965	
	<16	0.099	0.210	0.219	0.269	0.359	0.230	
17-19	0.105	0.173	0.143	0.153	0.177	0.190	0.222	0.156
20-24	0.057	0.152	0.132	0.112	0.200	0.100		0.125
25+	0.097	0.133	0.159	0.118	0.571			0.133
Total	0.087	0.165	0.157	0.176	0.249	0.199	0.237	0.171
Age at First Marriage	Algeria, MCH 1992							Total
	1987-1992	1982-1987	1977-1982	1972-1977	1967-1972	1962-1967	<1962	
	<16	0.067	0.039	0.146	0.147	0.179	0.202	
17-19	0.033	0.092	0.075	0.088	0.121	0.102	0.143	0.086
20-24	0.050	0.103	0.094	0.088	0.159	0.143		0.090
25+	0.031	0.193	0.163	0.111	0.154			0.117
Total	0.042	0.105	0.102	0.105	0.153	0.161	0.282	0.118
Age at First Marriage	Sudan, MCH 1992/1993							Total
	1987-1992	1982-1987	1977-1982	1972-1977	1967-1972	1962-1967	<1962	
	<16	0.096	0.160	0.149	0.159	0.181	0.191	
17-19	0.060	0.084	0.107	0.153	0.144	0.138	0.200	0.107
20-24	0.048	0.076	0.145	0.138	0.217	0.273		0.107
25+	0.111	0.152	0.228	0.269	0.167			0.160
Total	0.073	0.117	0.144	0.159	0.177	0.186	0.180	0.142
Age at First Marriage	Lebanon, MCH 1996							Total
	1991-1996	1986-1991	1981-1986	1976-1981	1971-1976	1966-1971	<1966	
	<16	0.027	0.085	0.039	0.099	0.039	0.060	
17-19	0.018	0.054	0.034	0.036	0.048	0.028	0.038	0.037
20-24	0.005	0.024	0.037	0.019	0.052	0.062		0.028
25+	0.014	0.031	0.051	0.016	0.000			0.025
Total	0.012	0.041	0.039	0.041	0.043	0.048	0.056	0.037

**Place of current residence:** Should we expect disproportionate divorce rates according to level of urbanization (notably; urban and rural dichotomy)? In which direction should be and why? Large and urban centers are characterized by greater heterogeneity and looser social control, Shelton (1987). Additionally, it is characterized by higher rates of women’s participation in the labor force, higher prevalence of education among females. On the other hand, rural societies, especially in our region, are characterized by stronger patriarchal regime- on which male domination and control over women is legitimated. A rural husband easily divorces his wife for one “important reason” - if she threatens his procreativity (i.e., if she is infertile) and for endless trivial reasons (e.g., disobeying in-laws, not preparing food in time, etc..). Furthermore, early age at marriage, is a main feature of nuptiality in rural areas. And as we previously found, early age at marriage is very much correlated with high risk of divorce. These different acting forces in rural and urban places may bring the two divorce rates closer to each other. Examining our data, results show no remarkable differences between urban and rural areas in almost all the Arab countries but Lebanon, (Table 5. first Column). However, when age at marriage is controlled, a different revelation comes out. Levels of divorce among early marriages in urban places are consistently higher than that among the same marrying group in rural areas.

Table 5. Percentage Ever-divorced according to Age at First Marriage and Place of Current Residence, Ever-married Women (15-49)

Country	Age at First Marriage					
	Place of Residence	Total	<17	17-19	20-24	25+
Egypt DHS 2000	U*	6.6	13.7	6.3	4.5	3.9
	R	6.6	9.6	5.1	4.0	4.0
Algeria MCH 1992/93	U	12.0	20.3	10.3	9.6	9.8
	R	12.4	19.6	7.6	8.9	16.3
Tunisia DHS 1988	U	5.2	10.2	6.2	3.6	4.1
	R	4.3	7.8	3.8	2.7	5.6
Morocco DHS 1995	U	17.9	27.9	18.8	11.3	13.7
	R	17.8	24.5	14.6	14.0	14.0
Sudan MCH 1993	U	15.3	18.3	11.7	11.3	18.2
	R	14.3	16.6	10.6	10.8	14.2
Lebanon MCH 1996	U	5.2	7.5	6.2	4.1	2.9
	R	2.5	5.4	1.6	1.6	2.3

U: urban, R: rural

**Level of education:** contrary to the common believe among the public, consistently the prevalence of divorce declines among the highly educated females (of secondary level of education or more) if compared with the illiterates, as results of Table 6. indicate. This negative association still holds even when we control for age at first marriage. Similar results have been documented in other studies, (Martin and Bumpass, 1989). For each age at marriage group, in almost all the Arab countries, education is negatively associated with level of divorce. Moreover, within each educational level, the prevalence of divorce is highest among those started their marriage in their early years of

life. This extremely early age at marriage adversely influences the life of women even those who go for higher educational levels. The prevalence declines thereafter to almost half its level with rising age at marriage. It seems that the risk of divorce is high among the illiterates who marry at older age (25+) if compared with those started little earlier (17-19 and 20-24), this is the case for all the countries under study except in Lebanon.

Table 6. Percentage Ever-divorced according to Age at First Marriage and Level of Education, Ever-married Women (15-49)

Country	Level of Education	Age at First Marriage				
		Total	<17	17-19	20-24	25+
Egypt DHS 2000	Illiterate	08.5	10.9	6.5	6.2	8.3
	Secondary+	03.1	11.4	3.5	2.7	2.4
Algeria MCH 1992/93	Illiterate	13.1	20.0	9.2	9.8	14.0
	Secondary+	05.9	(20.0)	2.3	6.0	6.8
Tunisia DHS 1988	Illiterate	05.2	9.2	5.1	3.4	4.2
	Secondary+	03.6	(5.9)	4.8	2.8	4.2
Morocco DHS 1995	Illiterate	19.2	26.8	15.9	13.8	17.7
	Secondary+	10.5	13.3	17.7	7.9	8.5
Sudan MCH 1993	Illiterate	16.7	17.9	13.0	15.4	20.2
	Secondary+	07.0	(29.2)	4.8	4.1	8.2
Lebanon MCH 1996	Illiterate	05.3	8.3	4.1	5.6	3.7
	Secondary+	02.4	(19.0)	5.1	0.6	1.9

Numbers in parenthesis are for cases less than 30.

In conclusion, the negative role of early marriage on marital stability persists even when we control for some social forces such as level of education and urbanization. Being illiterate and initiating the marriage at adolescence strongly threatens marriage stability. Additionally, these last two forces; education and level of urbanization, independently from age at marriage, have an effect on marriage instability in two different ways. Rising level of education causes a decline in the risk of divorce and in contrast rising level of urbanization has an inverse impact.

**Fertility/ Infertility:** In most of the developing countries especially the Arabs, births occur exclusively within marriage so that marital stability has direct relevance to fertility levels. Fertility has several dimensions with each has its own impact on divorce. These include among others; inability to conceive and inability to have a live birth, the birth of the first child, inability to have a boy child, low fertility, and high fertility. Infertility in most of the Arab societies is considered a legitimate reason for divorce, especially if it is the wife who is infertile. Interestingly to notice that women themselves believe in it and even they are injustice toward themselves. A significant portion of the Egyptian women, as an illustration, (about one third) agrees that the husband has good reason to seek divorce if his wife was unable to have children and denies in the same time such right for the wife in case that her husband is responsible for childlessness. In contrast a much lower percent, 6.4%, agrees that the wife has good reason to seek divorce if the husband

was unable to have children and denies such right for the husband in case that his wife is responsible for childlessness, (El-Saadani, 2003).

Whether the observed percent of couples that have been divorced and childless is an indication of infertility is a cause of divorce or an outcome to the fact that a large number of family breakups occur prior to the stage of family formation? We believe that infertility is a strong cause but we expect in the same time that its relative weight on divorce is overestimated for a number of confounding forces: Those who divorce early (at shorter duration) have of course less time to accumulate children, (Chester, ;Fargues, 2003; Morgan, 1986; Morgan and Rindfuss, 1985; Cherlin, 1977). Another confounding factor is that in traditional societies, groom's family can not stand few month delay in conception, which is mostly the case whenever the bride in the adolescent age. Another source of bias is that the unhappy couples who are uncertain of the viability of their marriage may avoid parenthood. Some wives who are living in disharmony with their husbands may obtain abortion so that it becomes easier to obtain divorce and in the same time to avoid the unfavorable consequences (that happens in case of having children from that marriage).

Great importance was placed on producing boy children in marriage. Still in the Arab region, having a son (sons) is of central value for the family, at the very least boy child preserves the family line. Failure to produce boy children is considered a justifiable reason for family disruptions.

With regard to the role of presence of children several studies have contradictory reports. Some view the presence of children at the very best stabilizes the marital relationships and provide additional bonds to the couples and at the worst, make the couples remaining together for "the sake of children" and hence divorce is postponed and sometimes is averted even if marriage is unhappy. The welfare of the children is still of strong force to hold the couples together in the Arab countries. Morgan and Rindfuss (1985) show that marital first births reduce the likelihood of divorce at all duration of marriage. Lutz et. al (1991) suggested U relationship. The childless couples and those who have high fertility have the highest risk of marital disruption even controlling for duration of marriage. Another factor is the age-stage of the children. Couples with pre-school children have the lowest levels of satisfaction with their marriage and with life in general of any married couples, young children create crisis that may threaten marital stability (Cherlin, 1977; Chester, 1972; Lutz, et al., 1991).

In our primary analysis of data on the number of children ever born among ever married women (15-49), Table 7, we can see that not only the childless wives appear disproportionately among the divorced women (whether ever or currently divorced) but also those who have one child. The proportions childless among ever divorced and currently divorced take the range 12.2 % (Sudan) to 33 % (Tunisia) and 19.3% (Sudan) to 50% (Tunisia), respectively. While the comparable proportion childless among the currently married group takes the range 5.4% (Sudan)<sup>8</sup> to 20.4 (Lebanon). Proportions with one child among ever divorced and currently divorced take the range 18.3 % (Sudan) to 34.9 % (Lebanon) and 27.1% (Tunisia) to 43.7% (Morocco), respectively. In the mean time, the corresponding figures among the currently married group are much lower, takes the range 10.9% (Sudan) to 19.3% (Egypt).

Having two children secure marriage stability to some extent, nevertheless, data do not show a pattern of association as consistent as in the previous two cases. When we examine the mean number of children ever born among the groups who have one or more children, data provide evidence to the negative association between marital instability and fertility. This is evident for all the countries under study.

Table 7. Fertility Pattern among Ever Married Women (15-49) Who Have Marriage Duration Two or More Years and Never Used Contraceptives by Marital Status

Country	Fertility (proportion)	Currently married (once)	Ever Divorced	Currently Divorced
Egypt DHS 2000	Childless	19.4	27.7	27.0
	1	19.3	27.4	36.9
	2	15.2	11.7	12.9
	Mean‡	3.87 ± (2.869)	2.99 ± (2.329)	2.48 ± (2.207)
Algeria MCH 1992/93	Childless	14.6	24.7	29.2
	1	11.1	26.4	32.5
	2	12.0	14.1	16.7
	Mean	5.09 ± (3.291)	3.44 ± (2.934)	2.29 ± (1.786)
Tunisia DHS 1988	Childless	10.8	33.0	50.0
	1	12.6	24.0	27.1
	2	12.9	10.0	12.5
	Mean	4.59 ± (2.832)	3.13 ± (2.269)	2.08* ± (1.742)
Morocco DHS 1995	Childless	15.5	25.8	40.8
	1	14.0	23.4	43.7
	2	11.5	13.9	09.8
	Mean	5.32 ± (3.540)	3.55 ± (2.762)	1.48 ± (0.994)
Sudan MCH 1993	Childless	5.4	12.2	19.3
	1	10.9	18.3	30.9
	2	12.2	13.7	17.2
	Mean	5.16 ± (3.090)	4.19 ± (2.784)	2.77 ± (2.098)
Lebanon MCH 1996	Childless	20.4	30.2	26.9*
	1	16.1	34.9	38.5*
	2	15.3	18.6	26.9*
	Mean	3.73 ± (2.609)	2.22 ± (2.027)	1.58* ± (0.693)

\* Cases are less than 30.

‡ The mean is for those who have one or more children ever born.

Vital Statistics data on Egypt clearly demonstrate the severe burden of infertility, Table 8. Such massive prevalence of childlessness among women who did not complete their first year of marriage is expected for such short period. However, for longer durations, 1-4 years, on average three quarters of the divorced women are childless, and about half of those their marriages lasted to less than 10 years are childless. Such high prevalence of childlessness among the divorced Egyptian women is believed to be the prime cause of their divorce.



Table 8. Prevalence of childless Women among the Divorced according to Duration of Marriage, Egypt Vital Statistics

Duration of Marriage	Percentage Childless*		
	1996	1986	1976
Less than a year	97.9	96.5	98.4
1-	88.7	88.0	87.5
2-	75.7	76.7	74.9
3-	65.3	68.8	65.6
4-	54.3	60.7	56.3
5-	48.1	50.6	49.7
10-	40.9	43.3	41.9
15-	37.6	35.0	20.3
20+	34.2	29.9	22.1
Total	74.2	72.7	74.6

\* Those who have zero living children.

***Women's participation in the labor force:*** work is not simply the dichotomy work/does not work. Wife's work (or any individual's) includes several important dimensions: the wife's type of occupation, number of work hours, or number of hours the wife is absent from home, weekly or monthly income, the wife's earning relative to her husband's, and work experiences the wife gains. Women all over the world have always worked for their families (unpaid family workers) inside their homes or in farms or families' enterprises, producing goods and services, (Greenstien, 1990). The attention of the role of their work on marital instability aroused when women began to earn cash income and had to be absent for specific several hours from home to places different from their families' enterprises. Many scholars held the typical view that the availability of employment for women outside their homes had caused and or facilitated marital disruption. The line of reasoning is based on several mechanisms through which wife's work (and its five dimensions), may cause matrimonial failure or act as a facilitator, they include among others; a) The economic resources and gains through work increase women's behavioral autonomy, their independence, their opportunities of self-support, their negotiation for more egalitarian relationship, and the general gain in freedom. These positive outcomes of work may threaten the family stability through the breakdown of the patriarchal type of the family life, in which the husband is the dominant person, and the prime decision maker, (Aghajanian, 1986, Pearson, et. al, 1979; Trent and South, 1989; Greenstein, 1990), b) working wife suffers double work burden. Because the traditional distinct marital roles for husband and wife did not change, housework and child care are still the wife's responsibility. This double burden may increase stresses and/or marital dissatisfaction, leading to divorce or separation, c) the stability of the marriages would be threatened if wives' earnings are relatively higher than their husbands' or if they had higher occupational prestige or when their marriages constrains or limits their career opportunities, and d) in cultures and communities where working women are much less prevalent, the prevailed norms and traditions act against women's self-independence, and their seeking for egalitarian relationships. Moreover, work regulations and environment are not constructed in such a way to cater for working women's needs (e.g., lack of nursery schools for young children, lack and unavailable means to hire housemaids, etc..) These social forces altogether cause tensions, stresses in family life and may cause to divorce.

On the other hand, wife's gained economic resources may act as a facilitating factor in case of matrimonial failure. It provides the requisite means for dissolving the unhappy marriage. Working wives can maintain their lives after divorce. A woman without a job may tolerate and continue her marriage even if she is not content for various reasons, whereas the employed woman would be less likely to continue such marriage. Quoted from the National (1891, cited in Greenstein, p:659)

“Many a woman who would have clung to a worthless husband from dread of starvation did she leave him, now reasons that she can make a better living freeing herself from a tiresome encumbrance and going to work in a shop or factory”.

There are, however, two other mechanisms through which wife's work presumably may act in the opposite direction, i.e., in holding the marriage life. Wife's income supports the family, hence, lessens the economic hardships that creates stresses on the spouses, (Hannan, et. al, 1977). Greenstein (1990) found that the rate and timing of marital disruption was negatively related to wives earnings. Moreover, wife's earning may serve to make staying in the marriage more attractive as marriage specific assets and capital increases. (Ross and Sawhill, 1975, cited in:)

The empirical findings are equivocal<sup>9</sup>, some literature, albeit few, and some goes back to the first half of the last century, viewed the relationship between women's independence and divorce is uncertain (Folsom, 1937 cited in: Pearson et al. 1979; Goode, 1956 cited in: Greenstein, 1990) or held the view that divorce is a cause rather than an outcome of wife's work, it propels women into the labor force, especially in societies where women's participation in the labor force is trivial, (Pampel and Tanaka, 1986; Semyonov, 1980, both are cited in: Trent and South). Smith (1981) found that in Thailand where work among females was prevalent (90 per cent of Thai wives having worked before marriage) work was associated with marital stability as compared with Sri Lanka in which 35 per cent of Sri Lankan wives worked prior to marriage and work was associated with more marital breakup.

When we think through these arguments, we can see that they fail to explain the situation in Egypt and almost all over the Arab countries. During the first half of the twentieth century, the prevailed culture at these times was placing strong inhibitions on women participation in the labor force (working women constituted a far more serious departure from social norms that forced men to refuse marrying them or at least let men put a condition—“the prides put aside job before marriage”) and yet the divorce was widely spread and every group was making use of it. About 50 divorces were recorded for each 100 marriage in Egypt, 42.8 per 100 marriages in Algeria, 49 in Morocco, (Fargues, 2003) and as noted by Fargues (2003, p:257) “One marriage out of two broken by divorce--such a frequency of divorce is not exceptional in the Arab world at that period”. The witnessed declining levels of divorce in the times when female's participation in the labor force becomes a standard norm in the following half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, lead us to judge that females' work per se does not signify the leading threat to marital stability.

Nevertheless, an important handling of the presumed relationship, deserves paying attention, has been raised by Trent and South (1989, p:393). They put the relationship between women's work and divorce in a context of the stage of the socio-economic, modernization, industrialization, and egalitarianism that a society go through. They

proposed that the relationship may take a curve-linear form; high divorce may fall initially as women's status improve, but in the long run with high levels of industrialization, modernization, etc., the trend will be upward.

The meager information available in our hand show that divorced women in all Arab countries under study are disproportionately appear among the previously worked group prior to their marriages and the currently working group, Table. 9. The last result is fraught by the fact that working status is measured after the fact. Available data do not allow measuring working status during marriage.

Table 9. Percentage Divorced according to Women's Work Status, Ever-married Women (15-49)

Country	Marital Status	Women's Work				Total
		Current Work Status		Premarital Work Status		
		Yes	No	Yes	No	
Egypt DHS 2000	Ever divorced	7.4	6.4	8.3*	7.1	08.5
	Currently divorced	4.5	2.3	2.6	2.4	03.1
Algeria MCH 92/93	Ever divorced	27.0	11.2	12.2	12.2	13.1
	Currently divorced	19.4	3.5	7.2	4.2	05.9
Tunisia DHS 1988	Ever divorced	9.1	4.3	5.1	4.8	05.2
	Currently divorced	4.8	1.7	2.7	1.9	03.6
Sudan MCH 1993	Ever divorced	25.3	13.1	17.0	14.4	16.7
	Currently divorced	11.8	5.0	7.6	5.7	07.0
Lebanon MCH 1996	Ever divorced	9.8	8.0	4.1	3.4	05.3
	Currently divorced	3.0	1.5	1.8	2.5	02.4

\* Data for Egypt are from MCH 1991.

**Level of divorce repetition** Although on the national level, divorce is declining, on the individual level it seems that the risk of repeating divorce among those whose first marriages were dissolved is escalating. Table 10. below, provides estimates of the percent of women who have been married for two or more times among the currently married, the currently divorced and the total women. It is quite clear how marital stability among the divorced women extremely deviates from the level among those who are currently married. The percentage of the currently divorced who have been married for more than once is more than two to four fold the level among the currently married for 2+ times or the population total. This confirms previous findings, see for example, (Chamie, J. and S. Nsuly, 1981; Cherlin, 1977)

Table 10. Percentage of Women (15-49) Who Have Married Two or More Times by Current Marital Status

Country	Survey	Current Marital Status		
		Total Women	Married	Divorced
Egypt	DHS 2000	4.0	3.5	16.1
	WFS 1980	9.0	8.3	24.3
Algeria	MCH 1992/93	9.5	8.6	19.1
Tunisia	DHS 1988	2.9	2.7	10.7
	WFS 1980	4.4	4.3	12.0
Morocco	DHS 1995	13.4	12.6	17.4
	WFS 1980	15.8	14.7	26.0
Sudan	MCH 1992/93	9.4	8.6	19.5
	WFS 1978	10.5	10.2	13.8
Lebanon	MCH 1996	1.7	1.4	9.8

#### IV. Logistic analysis of the risk of divorce and the likely correlates

We carried out a multiple logistic regression analysis for each country separately. This is an attempt to provide the reader a proper answer to the following question: to what extent we are able to predict the risk of divorce if we know the only characteristics that have been discussed in the previous section. Another important objective, of course is to measure precisely the “true” relationship of each variable with the likelihood of divorce after controlling for the interplay of the other variables<sup>10</sup>. In this logistic analysis, the dependent variable takes value one if the woman is ever divorced and zero if she is currently married. The predictors include: marriage cohort, age at first marriage, total number of children ever born, place of current residence, current working status and level of educational attainment. The analysis provides important results, Table 11., All the predictors are statistically significant (at p-values < 0.05 and < 0.01) and acquire the assumed path of association with the odds of divorce except place of current residence in Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and Sudan. Controlling for the other variables, the results are consistent with the hypotheses discussed earlier. Uniformly, in the 6 Arab countries, results confirm previous findings; that the recent marriage cohorts have lesser probabilities of marriage dissolution. To be a barren woman or have one child is a powerful predictor of the chance of matrimonial failure. The odds of divorce for this group is well above that for those who have 3 or more children (it takes values range from twelve to twenty times as high as the odds among the later group). The younger the age at marriage the higher the probability that a marriage dissolves. For those who got married at ages less than 17 the odds of marriage break up is two fold that among those married at older ages. It is interesting to notice that in Egypt, Tunisia, and Lebanon, even those married at ages 17-19 have a chance of divorce higher than that among those married at ages above 20. The more educated the woman the less likely that her marriage breaks up. Results prove that divorced women disproportionately appear among the working population. The odds of divorce among the currently working women is highest in Lebanon, where it is 5 fold higher than that among the non working group. Place of residence has a relation with the chance of matrimonial failure not as consistent as we found with all other variables. Living

**Table 11. Multiple Logistic Regression Analysis for the Probability of Divorce among Ever-Married Women (15-49), Different Arab Countries**

Predictors	Egypt		Tunisia		Morocco		Algeria		Sudan		Lebanon	
	B	Odds Ratio	B	Odds Ratio	B	Odds Ratio	B	Odds Ratio	B	Odds Ratio	B	Odds Ratio
<b>Marriage Cohort #</b>												
0-4	-3.184**	0.041	-2.655**	0.070	-3.006**	0.050	-3.370**	0.034	-2.482**	0.084	-2.991**	0.050
5-9	-1.452**	0.234	-0.900**	0.407	-1.274**	0.280	-1.212**	0.297	-1.271**	0.280	-0.673*	0.510
10-14	-0.515**	0.597			-0.732**	0.481	-0.624**	0.536				
15-19	-0.326**	0.722										
<b>Total Number of Children Ever Born</b>												
0	2.489**	12.043	2.856**	17.389	2.866**	17.568	2.536**	12.627	1.969**	7.165	3.001**	20.106
1	2.596**	13.412	2.642**	14.048	2.491**	12.071	2.938**	18.885	2.133**	8.441	3.223**	25.114
2	1.130**	3.097	1.052**	2.863	1.274**	3.574	1.546**	4.693	1.318**	3.737	1.382**	3.984
<b>Age at First Marriage</b>												
<17	0.789**	2.202	1.034**	2.812	0.761**	2.140	0.874**	2.397	0.260**	1.296	1.278**	3.588
17-19	0.289**	1.336	0.423*	1.527	0.313*	1.367					0.734**	2.084
<b>Place of Residence</b>												
Rural	-0.193**	0.825	-0.240	0.786	-0.053	0.948	0.038	1.039	-0.151	0.859	-0.735**	0.479
<b>Current Work Status</b>												
Yes	0.497**	1.643	0.856**	2.353	-		0.973**	2.645	0.649**	1.915	1.768**	5.858
<b>Educational Status</b>												
Primary & Preparatory												
Secondary+	-0.842**	0.431	-0.643*	0.526	-0.598**	0.550	-1.037**	0.354	-0.956**	0.384	-0.732**	0.481
<b>Constant</b>	-2.832**	0.059	-3.576**	0.028	-1.966**	0.140	-2.466**	0.085	-1.938**	0.144	-3.753**	0.023

Dependent variable takes value one for ever divorced and value zero for currently married.

Reference groups: Marital cohort (20+) for Egypt, 15+ for Morocco, Algeria and Sudan, and 10+ for Tunisia and Lebanon; Total number of children ever born (3+); Age at first marriage (20+) and 17+ for Algeria and Sudan; Place of current residence (urban); Current working status (No); Educational status (below secondary) and (illiterates) for Lebanon.

# Expressed in 5-year periods prior to the survey

in rural areas has statistically significant negative association with the chance of divorce in only two counties, Egypt and Lebanon.

Another noteworthy result that have far revealing implication for the addressed question is what have been declared by the classification table of the logistic model. In the table below, Table 12, we provide the percentages of rightly predicted cases of the observed ones. It is apparent that although the model has significant goodness of fit and all the predictors are statistically significant and they all confirm the assumed courses of association, the model powerfully predicts only the currently married women (above 97% of them) for all the Arab countries. On the other hand, the model fairly predicts the ever divorced group (6% in Tunisia to as high as 20% in Morocco). It assigns probabilities lower than 0.50 to be ever divorced for the rest of the cases. We examined the characteristics of those rightly predicted by the model, case of Egypt as an example, (table not shown). Ninety percent of the rightly predicted divorced women were illiterates, 84.9% were of age less 17 at time of marriage, and 74.7% belonged to older marriage cohorts (1980- 1985, or earlier), 40.4 % were childless, 54.5% were rural residents, and 76.4% were working at time of the survey taking. In contrast, 54.2% of the rightly predicted currently married women were illiterates, 28.4% were of age less 17 at time of marriage, and 26.9% were member of older marriage cohorts (1980- 1985, or earlier), 8.4 % were childless, 55.9% were rural residents, and 83.7% were working. This highlights on one hand, the strong weight of childlessness, age at marriage, level of education, and time of marriage on the incidence of divorce. And on the other hand, it tells us that there are in the same time missing variables that would predict to great extent the likelihood of divorce among the study population. They include as we suppose, duration of marriage, measure of the extent of age and education discrepancies between the wife and the husband , the level of discrepancy in their socio-economic background, the familial living arrangement (e.g., living in nuclear or extended family), polygamy, kinship marriages, the husband's occupation, the wife's work during marriage, her relative income.

Table 12. Percent Correctly Predicted according to the Multiple Logistic Model

Correct Prediction	Egypt DHS2000	Tunisia DHC1988	Morocco DHS1995	Algeria MCH1992/93	Sudan MCH1993	Lebanon MCH1996
Currently Married	99.6	99.7	97.5	98.5	98.7	99.8
Ever Divorced	7.6	6.1	19.9	12.8	10.7	11.8
Overall Percentage	93.5	95.2	83.6	88.0	85.8	96.4

The Cut-off Probabilistic Value is 0.50

### ***Conclusion***

The apparent fall in the level of divorce on the national level in almost all of the Arab countries under study, in contrast to the well spread feel that they are in the rise, takes place concurrently with noticeable movement toward more developed societies as marked by the many general measures that have received consensus from the world community if compared to the situation in the not very distant past. The Arab communities are witnessing rising levels of urbanization, modernization, and industrialization, spreading education, larger females participation in the labor force,

declining fertility, better health. Additionally, a remarkable rise in age at marriage, a fall in the extended family arrangements, and a movement away from family arranged marriage toward love matches are will recognized in the region.

On the individual level, the risk of marital disruption is associated with marriage at adolescence, low level of education, and living in urban centers. Inability to bear children is a strong threat to marital stability. Furthermore, most of marriage breakups take place within the first early years of marriage life.

While we believe that all of the aspects of marital disruption that have been covered in the chapter are crucial, we make no claim that all have been sufficiently studied. This forgoing analysis yielded data of more general significance. It would be fruitful to use these results as a basis for conducting a more appropriate field works to properly disentangle the many apparent correlates of marital instability; notably, duration of marriage, the couples different social class belongings, the discrepancies in age and level of education, work during marriage, relative incomes.

### **Acknowledgement**

This article is produced under the framework of a project on the “New Demography of the Arab Region”. The project is a collaborative effort between Arab Scholars, national and international institutions. It is coordinated by the Social Research Center (SRC) of the American University in Cairo and supported by Mellon, Hewlett and Ford Foundations. The author deeply appreciates the instructive comments of Professor John Casterline and the computer assistance provided by Mr. Amr Elsayed.

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## Annex 1

Table 1.1. Lowest and Highest Values on Some Socio-Economic- Health and Human Development Indexes in the Arab Countries

Measures	Lowest	Highest
Population size (000)	565 – Qatar	67885 – Egypt
Life Expectancy at Birth		
Females	48.6 – Somalia	77.2 – Kuwait
Males	45.4 – Somalia	73.2 – Kuwait
Infant Mortality Rate	75.3 – Yemen	10.2 – Qatar
Maternal Mortality Ratio per 100000 Live Births	550 – Mauritania	3 - UAE
Adult Illiteracy Rate %		
Females	76.1 – Yemen	16.6 - Jordan
Males	47.8 – Mauritania	5.5 – Jordan
Labor Force Participation Rate in Economic Activity %		
Females	8.6 - Oman	39.9- Mauritania
Males	43 – Libya	72 - Qatar
GDP per Capita (ppp US\$)	719 - Yemen	25314 - Kuwait
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Human Development Index Ranking, 1998	90 – Sudan	29 - Kuwait
Arab Human Development Index Ranking, 2002	105 - Sudan	68 - Jordan

Source: extracted from:UNDP and Arab Fund For Economic And Social Development. 2002. Arab Human Development Report. Tables of the Statistical Annex; pp:143-167. Table 1-Population, Table 2-Population, Table 5-Health, Table 7-Health, Table 14-Education, Table, 23-Employment and Productivity, Table 34-Human Welfare, Table 36-AHDI.

<sup>1</sup> Although in Islamic Shariaa, the right of repudiation is granted for both of the sexes, in practice in rare of the cases a wife can repudiate. Moreover, the prevailed traditions and culture, consider issuing wife’s right to divorce is against male’s masculinity.

<sup>2</sup> Results can’t be compared across countries for it needed to be adjusted for the plausible influence of dissimilarity in age structures.

<sup>3</sup> We lacked all means to measure precisely the proportion of women who ever experienced divorce in their lifetime. Thus, all women who are married two or more times are considered member of the ever-divorced group. Unknown fraction of the currently married and the currently widowed (who has been married 2+ times) is member of the ever divorced group. The measure “ever-divorced” thus provides an inevitable upward bias in the estimate of the ever-divorced group. But on the ground that the effect of mortality among adult male partners is of negligible magnitude. We expect the amount of bias is trivial.

<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the West developed many forms of non-marital unions and sexuality and as noted by Bunting (2004) “ the sequence of life events –marriage, sex, and children – has been radically reordered. Marriage rarely comes first and increasingly does not happen at all”.

<sup>5</sup> Number of divorces that had occurred in 1996, the numerator, are from the published tabulations of vital statistics volume of that year. Number of ever married women are from the published tabulations of 1996 census).

<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, availability of duration of marriage will allow the analysis of nuptiality trends to take account of the innate problem of censoring the information (the younger cohorts have not had the opportunity to complete their experience).

<sup>7</sup> One distinct example: in the Arab region adolescents marriages take place for the protection of females’ virginity while in the West, freedom of sexuality are the driving force.

<sup>8</sup> We believe that data on Sudan are under-reported.

<sup>9</sup> The conceptual and methodological difficulties in measuring the association between women’s labor force participation and the risk of divorce are not trivial.

<sup>10</sup> Of course these measured effects will be within the domain of the specified set of variables that have has been considered in the model. Another important caution is that the model suffers as previously mentioned, in endnote 6., from censoring of information or incomplete marital history. Making information on duration of marriage available would enable us to resolve this serious impairment.