

Causes of Divorce among Young Couples: A Phenomenological Study at the Semarang Religious Court

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Article Info

History Articles

Received:

9 May 2022

Accepted:

16 June 2022

Published:

30 August 2022

Keywords:

marriage, divorce,
young couple

Abstract

Marriage at a young age and lack of preparation are risky to various marriage problems which can lead to divorce. This phenomenological study attempted to describe divorce phenomenon among young couples. Its data were interpreted using a qualitative approach through thematic analysis. Within this analysis, those data were classified into four sub-themes, including: (1) factors which trigger household disharmony among young couples; (2) causes of divorce; (3) efforts made to protect household when there is disapproval from partners; and (4) reasons for filing for divorce. Findings showed that there were various factors that caused divorce among young couples according to mediators' opinions, selfish, unstable emotion, bad communication, and economy. Meanwhile, the young couples said that they filed for divorce because of abuse, infidelity, and unmet needs. Thus, these findings can give contributions to counselors, extension agents, and social workers, not to mention as a guide to provide pre-marital and post-marital guidance interventions for young couples.

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p-ISSN 2252-6889

e-ISSN 2502-4450

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is the first gate to pass by a young adult in his life. Getting married at young age is a challenge to face by young couples in their developmental crisis. In the past generation, marriage and becoming mother at young age are the social norm applied to woman, but this norm seems inapplicable in today's modern childhood (Crivello, et al., 2019).

Psychologically, child marriage affects the emotional stability. This instability cause young couples unprepared for fulfilling their obligations and rights after marriage.

Factors triggering child marriage are such as poverty, parents' demand, premarital pregnancy, education, and culture. According to Alfa (2019) child marriage in Indonesia is motivated by lack of premarital education or guidance, a movement of child marriage by some religious activists without preparing appropriate education to the couples. Other factors are matchmaking, parents, environment (customs) and the economy.

Tsania (2014) argues that child marriage will affect partner's independence due to unstable ego and unpreparedness to be a husband or wife. In addition, Shabbir, et al. (2015) woman who gets married at young age faces a lot of environmental and social problems so that she needs to quickly do adaptation. With low preparation in child marriage, several problems arise and may lead to divorce.

In reality, not all partner's wishes are realized properly in order to achieve household harmony or the term *sakinah* in Islam. Many of those wishes are not granted and end. Divorce is possible to happen in a household life because maintaining harmony, synergy, and sustainability of living as a husband and wife is not an easy job. Married couples often argue over opinions or principles. This may later become disputes that cause conflict. The resulting conflict can lead to divorce (Akbari et al, 2020).

Even, many young couples know a bit about things that cause divorce, ways to

overcome this problem, and how to cope with the local government interventions (Siddiqi, and Greene, 2020). Divorce may be a momentum to change the whole family perspectives; kids, partner, and even outside the core family (Thadathil, Sriram, 2019).

Semarang Religious Court, as the research site is one of the judicial environments within the judiciary that handles cases for Muslim people, such as requests for dispensation for marriage and divorce. Based on data from the Semarang Religious Court, there was an increase in divorce cases. From 2017-2018 there was an increase of around 9.5%, in 2019 there was an increase of about 8.2%. Some marriages at a young age between the ages of 18-25 years lasted no more than 5 years because divorce has become an alternative to overcome marital problems (Mohlatlole et al, 2018). Child marriage was reported as a major contributing factor to divorce by 45.1% of individuals and by at least one partner out of 61.1% of couples (Scott et al, 2013) The causes of divorce are often complex because several factors can cause a person or partner to be dissatisfied with marriage (Bezuidenhout, 2017).

Divorce can happen for many reasons, based on the data from the Religious Courts of the Supreme Court, the most common cause of divorce is household economic problems. In addition, divorce cases are also triggered due to problems of domestic violence (KDRT), apostasy or changing religions, polygamy, gambling, oppression, and adultery. Another cause of many young couples divorce is due to the communication factor.

Sriram & Duggal (2016) mention various reasons for increasing the rate of divorce, including violence, cruelty, alcoholism, adaptation issues, including within the family who lives together, selfishness, infidelity, and other impact outside the households regarding values, and lack of role models.

With regard to the above phenomenon, the present study attempted to describe a divorce phenomenon experienced by young couples. It aimed to reveal factors triggering young couples to divorce. The findings of this study are

expected to contribute to practitioners such as counselors, extension agents and social workers as well as being useful as a guide for pre-marital and post-marital guidance interventions for young couples.

METHODS

This study involved six young married couples and two mediators. The married couples were those who aged between 16-24 years who were having mediation process in Semarang Religious Court and had marriage length under 5 years. Meanwhile, the mediators were judges who have owned mediator certification and license and have been working for at least five years. Data were collected by interviewing the couples by referring to interview guidelines which contain four questions. Then, those were analyzed.

Actual data collection was carried out in several stages. First, a preliminary study was carried out to ensure the prospective subjects meet the criteria. Second, the researchers interviewed three couples and two mediators. In details, eight subjects were interviewed approximately 45 to 60 minutes, and their answers were recorded and noted. Third, the collected data were analyzed and interpreted. Fourth, after the analysis, the data were classified into several categories based on the themes, namely (1) factors which trigger household disharmony among young couples; (2) causes of divorce; (3) efforts made to protect household when there is disapproval from partners; and (4) reasons for filing for divorce.

Furthermore, the data analysis was done qualitatively through a thematic analysis. All processes were conducted by identifying the data of young couples divorce phenomenon in Semarang City. After it was over, those data were reviewed and classified based on the themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The collected data were analyzed based on the four predetermined themes.

Factors Which Trigger Household Disharmony Among Young Couples

Regarding this problem, the respondents were asked “what factors which cause the disharmony of the young couple households?.” The mediator considered ego, continuous verbal argument, and unmet demands of one partner as the triggers of this problem. The following is the excerpt:

“... the real trigger is each other's ego. No one wants to give in, wants to win with their own opinion, not thinking about the aftermath of divorce, especially for those who already have children.”

“...because of constant verbal argument, like the wife wants to live in a luxurious lifestyle but the husband can't fulfill it...”

Meanwhile, the perception of the young couple from the husband's side stated that there were too many demands from the wife, suspicion of a third person, parents in-laws interference and no mutual openness to each other. Some of the perceptions expressed regarding this matter are as follows:

“...I am tired of my wife's attitude who is demanding a lot. I was told to look for additional work because there was not enough money for my daily needs. Everytime I come home from work, she greets me work with a sullen face and sometimes nags...”(BD)

“...At first we were fine, but recently I suspected that my wife has another man, and it has turned out to be true...”(BE)

“...my wife has never been honest with me, including her job. I don't know how much her salary is and what division she works in. Besides that, her mother often interferes in our household matters...”(BF)

In addition, from the wife's side, 2 respondents stated that the husband committed acts of violence, never took time for his family, did not allow them to work and felt tired because of his husband's suspicions and accusations. The followings are excerpts regarding these opinions:

“...my husband is rude. I actually wanted to work, but I was not allowed to even though I have many needs...”(MD)

“...my husband never made time for his family. He comes home from work twice a week and even when I'm at home, he prefers going out to hang out with his friends...”(ME)

“...he's always suspicious and accuses me of nothing. I'm tired of being cornered. He is always angry, and when he's angry he often does physical abuse and curses at me...”(MF)

Based on the above opinions from the mediators and the young couples, factors causing the household disharmony were high ego, unstable emotion, bad communication, unmet demands, and parents in-laws interference.

Young Couples Reasons For Filing For Divorce

To reveal the causes of this topic, the researchers gave this question “what causes young couple to file for divorce?” Mediator said that young couples who file for divorce usually have the marriage length of 0-10 years, and it is motivated by several reasons, such as economic factors, no permanent jobs, and husband's low responsibility to fulfill family needs so that there will be continuous verbal argument from the couples and even physical abuse. The following is the mediators' ideas:

“... it is usually done by the husband who is less responsible in terms of economy, attention to his wife and children due to his tendency to still practice his teenage behavior, such as hang out with his friends, play smartphone games until his tension turns high and leads to violence to his wife. The ost party who files for divorce due to these reasons is female...”

“...because the husband doesn't have a permanent job or the husband doesn't want to work, the wife feels that she doesn't have enough support from her husband so that they keep arguing. When one of them is not strong enough to face the reality, she or he chooses to file for divorce ...”

The perception of young couples who filed for divorce was due to acts of violence, as expressed by MD respondents:

“...he often gave me physical abuse me. Even he hit me in front of my children. He also restrained me too much, so I think I cannot stand it anymore...”

Meanwhile, respondent MF said:

“...my husband was rude. He often hit and said rude to me...”

Respondents MD and MF were the parties who filed for divorce because of domestic violence. Meanwhile, BD respondent admitted that his actions were caused by emotional factors and job stress, as stated:

“...Every day there is something that causes us to fight, such as work problems. I work as a debt collector. Because of this pandemic, there were many who did not pay their debts, so I was already stressed because of the demands of work, but my wife always asked me to find additional work because there was not enough money for daily expenses. Sometimes I got emotional...”

Another reason young couples file for divorce was because of infidelity. As BE stated:

“...I'm a quiet person, but I always found out when there's something I suspected about my wife. After I gathered the evidence, my best choice was to end this relationship...”

On the other hand, the wife argued that the reason she had an affair was because her husband never paid attention and rarely spent time with his family. Meanwhile, respondent ME revealed that:

“...I did this for a reason, Ms. My husband never made time for our family. He only came home from work twice a week, and when he was home, he preferred going out hanging out with his friends...”

Efforts Made To Protect Household When There Is Disapproval From Partners

To answer this problem, the question given to the respondents was “why were the efforts made to protect the households got disapproval?” Actually, both defendants or respondents have ever made efforts to protect their households by asking for apologize, promising not to do the same thing, and discussing with families. However, each of those

party resisted to file for divorce by arguing they have given their partners the second chance but was not done well. Several perceptions regarding this topic are presented in the following excerpts:

“...I have apologized and I have promised not to mistakes again, but he was just silent and never advised me...”(ME)

“...I have already discussed with my biological and in-laws family, but still my wife wanted a divorce...”(BD)

“...I have persuaded her not to divorce. I have also discussed with her family, but his family supported my wife's decision...”(BF)

Meanwhile, the responses from the respondents were:

“...my decision has been unanimous, I wanted a divorce...”(BE)

“...I did not want it anymore. I have given her a chance but she has never changed...”(MD)

“...I still wanted a divorce. After all, my mother also supported...”(MF)

Reasons For Filing For Divorce

With regard to this problem, the respondents were given this question “what are your reasons for divorce?” Young couples thought divorce would end their problems. They also thought that protecting marriage with unsolvable problems will hurt them much. Several perceptions were given as follows:

“...I want the problem to resolve quickly because I already have limits on what I can forgive and what I can't...”(BE)

“...because there is nothing defend, even if it is maintained it will continue to hurt. I once gave a chance but he still made the same mistakes...”(MD)

“...for the good of me and my child. I can't live with rude and controlling men...”(MF)

It was found that the young couples who were in this study were married at the age in a period where emotional tension rose and unstable mood as well as emotion. Sadness and happiness seemed exaggerated and explosive, even difficult to control. This can be seen from the attitude of the husband who easily committed violence such as hitting and pointing

a knife in front of his wife when they were fighting.

Apart from the decision to divorce, one couple was found to cancel their divorce due to their love. It is supported by a study by Rei-Mei and Anthony (2013) which found four factors that can defend one's life, namely believe in god, struggle in meeting daily needs, obtain support from friends and others, and find freedom as well as hopes for the future.

This study also highlighted the main issues experienced by young couples, namely economic condition and bad communication that lead to verbal abuse. These are in line with a study by Hofheimer (2010), namely financial problem can contribute to stress to any kind relationship, including marriage. In addition, Brown and Manning (2010) state that money or anything related to it is the possible cause of disagreement among young couples.

Arnett (2014) shows that the causes of conflicts among young couples are the lack of financial planning or lack of communication over it. Therefore, it is important to discuss things related to economy, finance, and jobs before getting married. According to Bezuidenhout (2017) it is important for young couples to make their financial planning and commit to it for the sake of their households.

This study also found Domestic Violence (KDRT). It was not only physical abused, but also psychological. In this study, women mentioned violence as the reason they divorced.

Infidelity or extramarital affair also happened in this study. In a marriage life, infidelity is never justified. Here, the one who cheated was the wife. Starting from his suspicions, the husband began to find out and collect evidence. It apparently was true that there was a third party, namely another ideal man in his household. On the other hand, the wife committed an affair because her husband never paid attention and rarely spent time with family.

In the previously mentioned case, harmony can be achieved when husband and wife can establish a good relationship. To do so, there needs a warm interpersonal. Allport

mentions that a warm relationship is an indicator of a mature personality. A mature individual can love and develop himself into a caring relationship with others and consider others' business as equal as him. In other words, this individual is not selfish towards his partners.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data, the causes of divorce according to the mediators are selfish, unstable emotion, bad communication, and economy. Meanwhile, based on the perspectives of the couples, there are violence, infidelity, and unmet needs.

The limitation of this study takes place in its findings which cannot be generalized, and this study has not yet been comprehensive since it only focused on young couples divorce phenomenon. Therefore, the future studies are suggested to conduct specific investigations on the impact of divorce and its preventive ways. Also, a method which can make the findings become generalizable is needed. Another suggestion is to see divorce cases with old marriage age to discover any differences compared to the current study.

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