RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Comprehensive Socio-Demographic Analysis of Divorce Dynamics in Algerian Society (2005–2023) : Trends, Determinants, and Social Implications

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Abstract

Divorce has emerged as one of the most significant and rapidly expanding social phenomena in contemporary Arab societies, with Algerian society experiencing particularly notable growth in divorce rates over the past two decades. This escalation has raised serious social, demographic, and legal concerns, prompting increasing attention from researchers, policymakers, and legal institutions. Following the amendments to the Algerian Family Law in 2005, divorce rates began to rise markedly, reflecting shifts in legal frameworks, socio-economic conditions, gender relations, and cultural norms. According to official statistics, Algeria has been ranked among the countries with the highest divorce frequencies in the Arab world, recording an average of approximately six divorce cases per hour. Data from the Ministry of Justice indicate a continuous upward trend, with more than 63,000 divorce rulings registered in 2016 and nearly 68,000 cases recorded in 2017, a pattern that has persisted in subsequent years. These figures underscore the urgency of examining divorce not merely as a legal event but as a complex socio-demographic phenomenon with far-reaching implications for family cohesion, social stability, and child well-being. This study provides a comprehensive socio-demographic reading of divorce in Algeria between 2005 and 2023, drawing on official data from the National Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Justice. Using a descriptive and analytical approach, the paper explores the structural, social, economic, and demographic factors contributing to the increase in divorce, while also assessing its consequences for individuals, families, and society at large. Particular attention is given to the gendered and generational impacts of divorce, including the social marginalization of divorced women and the psychological and educational challenges faced by children. The findings aim to contribute to evidence-based policymaking and to support the development of preventive and intervention strategies addressing the root causes of marital dissolution in Algeria.

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Introduction

Marriage is the primary starting point for forming a family, playing a crucial role in organizing and exchanging roles among family members, positively reflecting on society as a whole. However, divorce has become one of the most widespread social and demographic phenomena, threatening the family unit and, by extension, society, which is composed of interconnected and cohesive families exchanging ideas and culture. Any disruption within these families negatively affects society.

The effects of divorce are evident for both genders, especially for divorced women, who are often marginalized by society. The psychological and social impacts are particularly pronounced for children, as divorce can lead to behavioral deviations, academic issues, and psychological stress due to the separation of their parents and their adjustment to new lives. These factors highlight the importance of examining divorce from a demographic perspective, which provides quantitative data to analyze and understand the evolution and measurement of this phenomenon.

The intensity of divorce varies from one society to another and from one country to another, making it a critical concern for researchers and policymakers. This study aims to clarify the nature of divorce, its causes, and its consequences for the family and society. The guiding questions are: What are the causes of divorce? What are its consequences for the Algerian family and society? To answer these, the descriptive method is applied, describing the phenomenon, identifying its main causes, noting some of its effects, and providing a socio-demographic analysis of divorce trends in Algeria from 2005 to 2023, based on data from the periodic report on Algerian demography by the National Bureau of Statistics.

1. Definition of Divorce

1.1. Linguistic Definition:

Divorce (ṭalāq) and release (iṭlāq) mean lifting or dissolving a constraint, whether tangible or symbolic, as in: "I released the camel from its halter," or "I granted you control over my property" (Maʿlūf al-Masʿūʿī, 1973, p. 470).

A man divorces his wife (ṭallaqa) by freeing her from the bonds of marriage; it can also refer to leaving or abandoning someone (Khalil al-Jarr, 1973, p. 18).

1.2. Terminological Definition:

Divorce is the lifting of the marriage bond immediately or financially through a specific expression, whether spoken, written, or indicated (Belhaj al-Arabi, 1994, p. 207). It is defined as ending the marital life through a term derived from the root of divorce or its meaning (Belhaj al-Arabi, 1994, p. 208). According to Professor Badran Abu al-Anein, divorce ends a valid marriage immediately or financially through an explicit or implied statement, nullifying the legal effects of a valid marriage. Mustafa Shalabi defines it similarly as dissolving a valid marital bond through a specific expression or its equivalent (Shalabi, 1983, p. 471).

1.3. Divorce in Algerian Law:

Article 48 of the Algerian Family Law (Law 05-02) defines divorce as the dissolution of the marriage contract by the husband's will, mutual consent, or at the wife's request within the limits of Articles 53 and 54 (Official Gazette, 2005, No. 15). The term "dissolution" encompasses all methods of ending marriage, whether unilateral, consensual, or judicial (Al-Arabi Bakhti, 2013, p. 10).

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1.4. Demographic Definition:

Roland Pressat defines divorce as the termination of the marital relationship by custom and law, categorized into three types: punitive divorce, separation-style divorce, and consensual divorce (Pressat, 1979, p. 53).

1.5. Divorce Rate:

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the divorce rate is the ratio of divorces during the year to marriages of the same year multiplied by 100.

1.6. Crude Divorce Rate (‰):

A statistical measure calculated as the number of registered divorces (cases themselves, not individuals) in a specific population over a year or period, divided by the average population in that period (ONS, 2023, p. 5). This rate provides a general idea of divorce relative to marriage, used for quick assessment without age or individual breakdowns.

2. Causes of Divorce in Algeria

2.1. Causes Related to Husband and Wife:

For men, causes include misunderstanding, polygamy, mistreatment of the wife, failure to provide for the family, age differences, illness, moral decline, and bad behavior (Ibtisam Halwani, 2008, p. 9).

For women, causes include dislike for the husband, infertility, bad behavior, immaturity, illness affecting sexual relations, infidelity, neglect of household affairs, old age, and disobedience (Jalal & Rkab, 2023, p. 86).

2.2. Social Causes:

Social causes are significant contributors, including parental interference, mismatched social, cultural, educational, moral, or religious levels, and conflicts over household roles. Increased female education and awareness of rights have shifted traditional marital stability patterns (Atif Gheith, 1970, p. 229).

2.3. Economic Causes:

Economic hardship, rising costs, unemployment, and poverty increase marital conflict and often

lead to divorce (Messaouda Kassal, 1986, p. 51).

2.4. Media and Communication:

The widespread media and Internet exposure spread global values, affecting societal perceptions of marriage and stability

2. Effects of Divorce

2.1. Demographic Effects:

Divorce impacts population structure, fertility, marriage age, and the number of unmarried adults, affecting demographic stability.

2.2. Social Effects:

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Divorce disrupts social ties between families and carries negative moral perceptions, especially towards women, influencing children's development and confidence (Ayman Shboul, 2010, p. 689).

2.3. Economic Effects:

Divorced husbands face financial burdens from wedding and marital costs, spousal support, and child support. Divorced women, especially non-working, may lose financial independence and face social and economic vulnerability.

3. Evolution of Divorce Cases in Algeria

3.1. Evolution of Marital Status:

Table 1: Marital Status of Algerians Aged 15+

Status	Males	Females
Single	1977: 37.1	21.8
	1987: 45.2	31.5
	1998: 51.1	40.5
	2008: 51.1	41.6
Married	1977: 60.7	62.3
	1987: 53.4	56.2
	1998: 47.8	49.6
	2008: 47.9	49.4
Divorced	1977: 0.8	2.7
	1987: 0.5	2.4
	1998: 0.4	2.0
	2008: 0.4	1.9
Widowed	1977: 1.4	13.2
	1987: 0.8	9.9
	1998: 0.7	7.9
	2008: 0.6	7.0

Source: Collections Statistiques No. 142/2008

The data indicate a clear increase in single individuals for both genders, a gradual decline in married individuals, a slight decrease in divorce, and a significant decline in widows/widowers, reflecting delayed marriage, social and economic changes, and improved life expectancy.
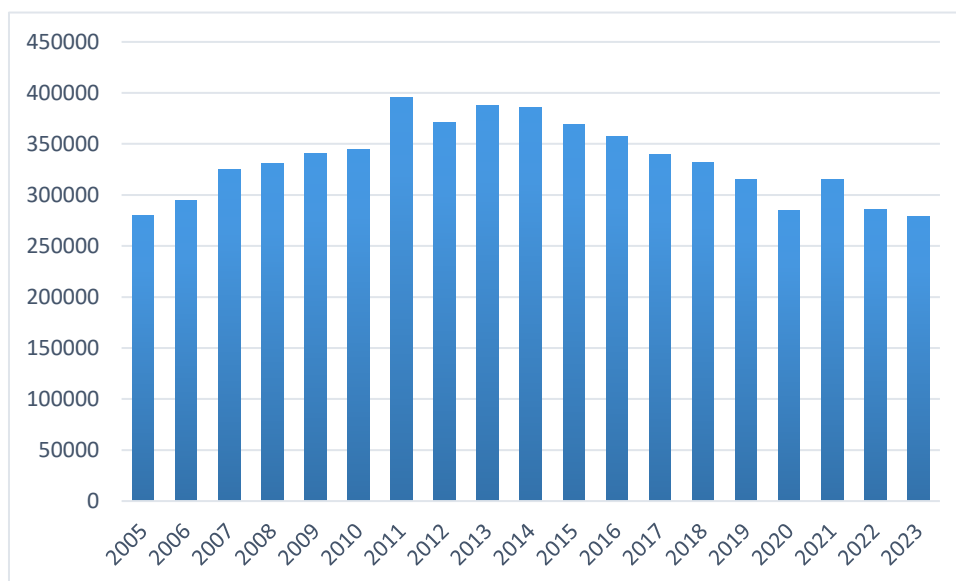
3.2. Divorce Indicators in Algeria (2005–2023):

Table 2: Divorce and Marriage Indicators

Year	Marriages (000s)	Crude Marriage Rate (‰)	Divorces	Divorce Rate (%)
2005	279.5	8.5	31,021	11.10
2006	295	8.82	34,623	11.72
2007	325	9.55	34,137	10.49
2008	331	9.58	39,396	11.90
2009	341	9.68	41,505	12.16
2010	345	9.58	49,845	14.46
2011	396	10.05	54,826	14.86
2012	371	9.9	54,985	14.81
2013	388	10.13	57,461	14.81
2014	386	9.88	60,844	15.75
2015	369	9.24	59,909	16.23
2016	357	8.73	62,128	17.42
2017	340	8.14	65,637	19.32
2018	332	7.79	65,690	19.80
2019	315	7.26	65,967	20.92
2020	285	6.43	66,791	23.47
2021	315	7.01	76,201	24.20
2022	286	6.26	84,072	29.44

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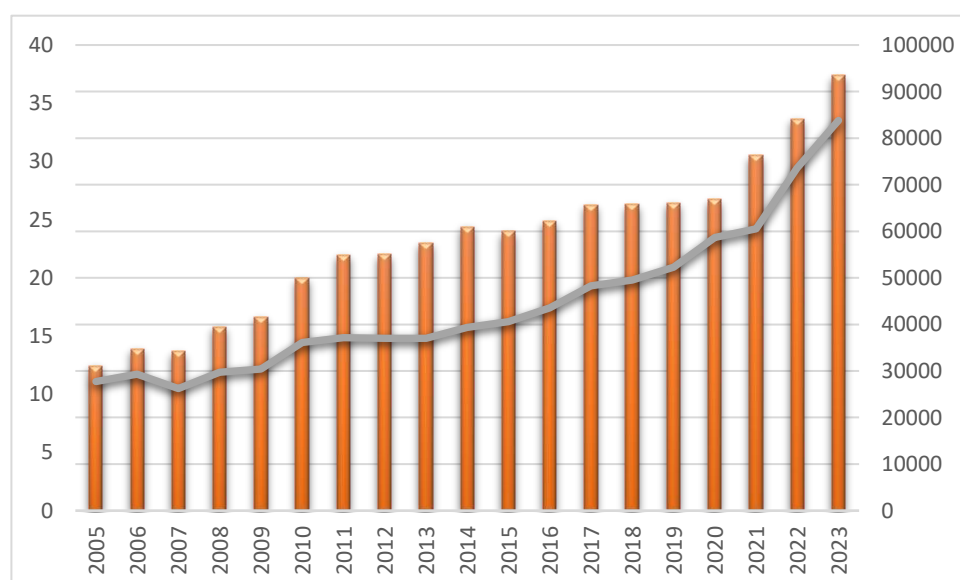| Year	Marriages (000s)	Crude Marriage Rate (‰)	Divorces	Divorce Rate (%)
2023	279	6.01	93,402	33.52

Source: Demography of Algeria, 2005–2023

Figure 1: Evolution of Marriages in Algeria (2005–2023)

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on the data in Table 2

Figure 2: Development of Divorce Cases and Rates in Algeria for the Period 2005–2023

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Source: Prepared by the researchers based on the data from Table (2)

The data in Table (2) and the two charts (1) and (2) show a complex dynamic of marriage and divorce indicators in Algeria during the period 2005–2023. Figure (1) shows that marriage experienced fluctuations followed by a clear downward trend. The data indicate an initial increase in marriages from 279.5 thousand in 2005 to a peak of 396 thousand in 2011, representing a significant increase over six years (about 116.5 thousand cases). After that, the trend became less clear, dropping to 371 thousand in 2012, then rising again to 388 thousand in 2013, stabilizing at approximately 386 thousand in 2014, before beginning a real decline to 332 thousand in 2018, and then only 279 thousand in 2023. This reflects that Algerian society experienced a post-2014 stabilization toward a decrease in the formation of new families, linked to a mix of demographic reasons (the notable decline in the number of youth aged 20–34, which accounts for 80% of marriage cases, decreasing from 10.997 million to 9.861 million between 2015 and 2023) (ONS, 2023, p. 5), economic reasons (high cost of living and unemployment), and cultural reasons (changing perceptions of marriage and family).

We also notice from the figures in the table above and Chart (2) that statistical indicators of divorce rates are trending upward, without significant stabilization or decline, except during the period 2011–2013, which experienced fluctuations in the number of marriages. Afterward, in 2014, divorce rates resumed increasing and continued at this pace, reaching their highest level in 2023 at 33.52%, representing an increase in the divorce rate of 2001.9%. It should be noted that the amendments introduced by the new Algerian Family Law in 2005 contributed significantly to these changes.

The rising divorce rates pose a demographic challenge with effects on the population, such as an increase in female-headed households that may face economic and social difficulties, as well as potential impacts on fertility rates and future population growth.

These indicators call for the implementation of comprehensive policies linked to social and economic development, including support for youth, improving marriage conditions, focusing on family education, and strengthening the role of family counseling.

Conclusion:

Between 2005 and 2023, Algeria experienced profound demographic and social transformations, reflected in noticeable changes in marriage and divorce rates. Marriages rose from 279.5 thousand in 2005 to a peak of 396 thousand in 2011, before beginning a continuous downward trend after 2014, reaching only 279 thousand in 2023, indicating a decline in the tendency to form new families. This decrease coincided with demographic shifts, particularly in population structure, along with economic and social changes such as rising living costs, unemployment, and increased youth singlehood, in addition to the influence of modern media and communication, which changed younger generations' views on marriage and family.

Conversely, the statistical curve for divorce rates followed an almost continuous upward trajectory, rising from 31 thousand in 2005 to more than 93 thousand in 2023, with the divorce rate increasing from 11.1% to 33.5%. This rise is associated with several factors, most notably the 2005 amendments to the Family Law, which expanded women's rights, including the right to initiate divorce (khula) without the husband's consent, facilitating separations and increasing the number of recorded cases annually.

Field studies indicate that these legislative changes responded to cultural and social transformations in Algerian families, granting women greater autonomy within marriage. However, these legal reforms also created new challenges, as family breakdown rates increased and divorce became a quicker option for resolving marital disputes, particularly in the absence of adequate family training and weak traditional social mediation.

Statistical analysis shows that the relationship between rising divorce and declining marriage rates is not solely legal in nature; demographic, economic, cultural, and social factors are intricately intertwined. This requires policymakers to adopt a comprehensive approach combining legislation with psychological and social support for families and strengthening mediation and family counseling institutions to address this phenomenon.

Recommendations and Suggestions to Reduce Divorce and Enhance Family Stability:

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- Design comprehensive family programs that focus on building internal relationships, clarifying roles and responsibilities for each family member, and enhancing skills in dialogue, understanding, and peaceful conflict resolution.

- Intensify family counseling and provide practical advice for couples before and during marriage, training them in family repair and mediation techniques without direct parental interference or favoritism toward either party, to maintain balance and protect the family from disintegration.

- Support regular media programs that address the social and demographic issues of Algerian families through interactive educational content encouraging dialogue and clarifying the consequences of divorce on children and society.

- Propose the establishment of a comprehensive national project involving governmental, civil, educational, and judicial sectors to create an accurate database monitoring citizens' social status and factors affecting divorce and marriage in each region, providing analytical results to inform effective family policies.

Ethical Considerations

This study is based exclusively on secondary data obtained from officially published reports and statistical records issued by the National Bureau of Statistics and the Algerian Ministry of Justice. No primary data were collected, and no human participants were directly involved in the research process. Consequently, ethical approval was not required. The authors adhered to academic integrity standards by ensuring accurate representation, proper citation of sources, and objective analysis of the data.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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