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Research Article

Modeling the Macroeconomic Determinants of Divorce: A Dynamic Panel GMM Approach for Iranian Provinces

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Abstract

Abstract: Divorce is a multi-stage process that affects both the relationships within a family and entangles the entire society in numerous problems. It is one of the fundamental harms and issues in society that causes the family unit to collapse. In recent years, divorce in Iran has been sharply increasing. This phenomenon significantly impacts the family and society. While economic factors are not the sole cause of divorce, they provide the groundwork for its occurrence. The effective economic factors include inflation, unemployment, per capita income, and the Gini coefficient or unequal distribution of per capita income. This study aims to investigate the economic roots of divorce in Iran. The present study investigates the economic roots of divorce in the provinces of Iran using a dynamic panel data model and the Generalized Method of Moments (GMM) over the period 2008–2018. The estimation results of the research model have shown that unemployment, inflation, and the Gini coefficient as an indicator of income inequality have an increasing effect on divorce, while an increase in per capita income has led to a decrease in divorce. Considering the increasing effects of unemployment, inflation, and income inequality on divorce, as well as the decreasing effect of per capita income on this social phenomenon, it is suggested to implement policies that strengthen economic growth, leading to higher per capita income and lower unemployment and inflation rates. Additionally, income redistribution policies, such as improving the tax system and the proper targeting of subsidies, should be employed to facilitate a reduction in divorce within Iranian society.

Keywords: Divorce, Unemployment, Inflation, Per Capita Income, Gini Coefficient.

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1 Introduction

The family is the most fundamental social institution and is always affected by societal transformations [1]. As one of the most significant social harms, divorce not only disintegrates the family foundation but also leaves extensive economic, social, and psychological consequences for individuals and society. In recent years, the divorce rate in Iran has been on an increasing trend; such that between 1996 and 2014, the number of registered divorces in urban areas nearly tripled [2]. This rising trend of divorce in society is an alarm for the cohesion of families and reveals the necessity of investigating its underlying factors.

Divorce is a multi-causal phenomenon that occurs under the influence of a set of individual, cultural, and structural factors. Among these, economic conditions, as a structural factor, play a significant role in the incidence of divorce. Financial problems and economic pressures can create tension and conflict in marital relationships, paving the way for the breakdown of a shared life. Of course, economic problems alone are not the direct cause of divorce, but they create a breeding ground for its increase [3]. In other words, economic turmoil is a hidden and delayed factor that weakens the family foundation over time. According to family economic theories (e.g., Becker's theory), household income fluctuations affect marriage stability [4, 5]. Empirical evidence also shows that macroeconomic variables are correlated with changes in the divorce rate. For example, studies in the United States indicate that increased inflation is significantly associated with a higher divorce rate. Furthermore, divorce rates increase during economic recessions and decrease during periods of prosperity; this can be seen as a result of the impact of financial pressures during crises and improved livelihoods during booms on family stability.

Unemployment, as one of the main indicators of economic status, has been linked to an increased likelihood of divorce in many studies. Job and income loss in a household can intensify financial tensions and marital dissatisfaction, increasing the risk of marital breakdown. Numerous international studies have confirmed this relationship. For instance, a panel study on OECD countries from 1995 to 2016 shows that, in the long run, an increase in the male unemployment rate significantly raises the divorce rate, while an increase in income level (per capita output) has a decreasing effect on divorce [6]. In other words, the more stable the employment and income status of households, the greater the likelihood of marital survival. Evidence from the US economy also confirms that improving the income of low-income households can lead to a decrease in the divorce rate; with every 1 increase in the state minimum wage, the divorce rate among low-income households has decreased by 7% to 15% [7]. This finding indicates that supportive livelihood improvement policies can indirectly strengthen family stability.

Another economic aspect affecting family stability is the level of income inequality and the class gap in society. Income inequality can negatively impact family relationships through mechanisms such as creating a sense of relative deprivation, reducing social capital, and increasing psychological tensions. Macro-level research in some countries indicates a positive correlation between economic inequality and increased divorce. For example, in a study examining changes in income inequality across US states, areas with greater growth in inequality over a decade experienced a larger increase in divorce rates [8]. This evidence suggests that the unfair distribution of wealth and income can be a breeding ground for the instability of an institution like the family.

Given the above, economic factors seem to play a decisive role in the occurrence of divorce. In Iran, although economic problems have been mentioned as one of the causes of divorce in recent years, comprehensive and systematic research investigating the impact of macroeconomic variables

such as unemployment, inflation, and income inequality on the divorce rate has been limited. The gap in the research literature necessitates a scientific approach and reliance on up-to-date data to analyze this issue. Therefore, the present study focuses on the economic roots of divorce in Iran. The aim is to identify and explain the role of key economic variables (including unemployment rate, inflation rate, per capita income, and the Gini coefficient as an indicator of inequality) on changes in the country's divorce rate to fill the existing research gap and provide the necessary scientific evidence for policy-making aimed at reducing divorce.

2 Theoretical Literature and Research Background

2.1 Theoretical Literature

Divorce is a multi-dimensional social phenomenon in which economic, social, cultural, and individual factors play a fundamental role [5]. Among these, numerous studies have emphasized the role of economic factors as one of the most influential in the occurrence of divorce [6, 7]. Economic conditions affect family life in two ways: first, by changing the stability and security of household income; second, by influencing the quality of interactions and internal family relationships [9].

According to the economic theory of the family [4], couples' decisions to continue or end a marriage depend on a cost-benefit analysis of the current financial situation and expectations for their economic future. This perspective suggests that household income fluctuations and economic shocks such as unemployment and inflation can lead to a reconsideration of family decisions, including divorce. For example, unemployment, as a major economic shock, can increase family tensions and marital dissatisfaction; this is particularly true when the male partner becomes unemployed due to his breadwinner role, increasing the likelihood of divorce [6, 10]. Empirical studies have also shown a direct relationship between rising male unemployment and increased divorce rates, as male unemployment reduces self-esteem, increases family tensions, and creates an inability to meet the family's economic needs [11, 12].

Inflation is another economic variable that can pave the way for the breakdown of marriage by reducing household purchasing power and creating additional economic pressure. As inflation rises, living costs increase and real household income decreases, exacerbating couples' economic problems and increasing marital conflicts [13, 14]. International evidence also confirms that inflation, by creating economic pressure, has a significant impact on increasing the divorce rate [9].

Income inequality, as another economic indicator, can also affect the divorce rate. Increased income inequality creates a sense of relative deprivation in families and increases internal family tensions; hence, the likelihood of divorce rises in societies with greater income inequality [8, 10].

On the other hand, more recent research has shown that the impact of economic variables on divorce is influenced by social conditions and the cultural context. For example, increased per capita income and improved household economic conditions have led to a decrease in divorce rates in some studies [7], but in societies with rapidly changing cultural values and individualism, this effect might be moderated or even reversed. Therefore, considering the interactions between economic and social conditions in analyzing the effect of these variables is essential.

In summary, it appears that economic shocks such as unemployment and inflation can affect the divorce rate by influencing households' economic situation and internal family relationships. This research seeks to explain the effects of these variables within a comprehensive socio-economic

framework to fill the gap in domestic research literature and provide a scientific basis for targeted policy-making to reduce the divorce rate.

2.2 Research Background

Various studies have examined the factors influencing divorce. Domestic studies have often investigated factors such as violence, social and economic capital, women's employment, and economic problems. For instance, Sotoudeh et al. (2022) showed that emotional and physical violence play the most significant role in divorce petitions in Semnan County, and economic factors such as economic irresponsibility also have a substantial impact [15]. Also, Ghodsi Mirjalili (2021) showed that a decrease in social, economic, and cultural capital has a significant negative relationship with women's tendency towards divorce [16].

Ebrahimi and Mohammadlou (2021), in a systematic review of previous studies, classified the underlying factors of divorce into three levels: individual (psychological-personality), interpersonal (addiction, education, religious beliefs), and supra-individual (cultural and economic factors such as unemployment and low income) [17]. Dori Najafabadi et al. (2021) also showed a positive effect of women's employment on divorce; however, according to their findings, household income and education level did not significantly affect divorce [18]. This finding is consistent with Mohammadi's (2021) study, which found no significant relationship between economic capital and women's tendency towards divorce [19].

Other studies, such as Ramezanifar et al. (2021) and Ghurchi Beigi & Eghbali (2020), emphasize that emotional and social factors like irresponsibility and domestic violence play a major role in the formation of emotional and consensual divorce, and economic factors are effective in intensifying these processes [20, 21]. Fooladian and Shojaei Ghaleni (2020) also examined the processes of divorce occurrence and found patterns such as forced marriage, heterogamy, and patriarchal family structures effective in increasing divorce [22].

Economic studies, including those by Mahdi Ghaemi Asl et al. (2019) and Bani Hashemi et al. (2018), have confirmed a positive and significant relationship between macroeconomic variables (unemployment and inflation) and the rising trend of divorce [23, 24]. These studies also emphasize the necessity of paying attention to social and educational control channels. Additionally, Rezazadeh et al. (2018) showed that a lack of awareness about marriage and marital skills are serious factors in divorce [25].

At the international level, research has also shown that economic factors such as unemployment, inflation, and income significantly impact divorce rates. For example, González-Val and Marcén (2016) found that unemployment in Europe has a counter-cyclical effect on divorce [9]. Schaller's (2013) studies also confirmed the cyclical behavior of marriage and divorce [26]. Dommaraju and Jones (2011) reported a different trend in Asian countries, showing that the trajectory of divorce is also dependent on the social and cultural context [27]. Lyngstad (2011), in a study of Norway, showed that increased male unemployment and couples' education levels led to an increase in divorce [28].

Other economic studies, such as Nunley (2007), Burgess et al. (2003), and Becker et al. (1977), have also found the effects of inflation and household income on divorce to be positive and significant [4, 29, 30]. For example, Weiss and Willis (1997) concluded that an increase in men's income reduces the likelihood of divorce, whereas an increase in women's income can increase the tendency for divorce due to economic independence [31].

In summary, a critical review of the research shows that economic variables like unemployment, inflation, and income inequality, alongside cultural and social factors, play an important role in shaping and changing the trajectory of divorce. Despite numerous domestic studies, most are based on limited samples and survey methods. Therefore, the present research, using macroeconomic data and official statistics from the Statistical Center of Iran, seeks to provide a more comprehensive and in-depth picture of the economic effects on the divorce rate in the country, an approach that constitutes the novelty and advantage of this study over previous research.

3 Model Specification and Data Description

This research seeks to investigate the economic roots of divorce in the provinces of Iran during the period 2008–2018. To test the hypothesis of whether unemployment, inflation, per capita income, and the Gini coefficient affect divorce, we will estimate the model below using panel data. The reason for selecting these variables and not other influential factors is the limited access to provincial data for many other economic variables, which can be considered one of the limitations of the present study. Given that the data structure is panel-based, dynamic panel data methods are used for model estimation. Based on the theoretical literature and research background, the proposed model is as follows:

$$GDiv_{it} = \alpha + \beta_0 un_{it} + \beta_1 Inf_{it} + \beta_2 Income_{it} + \beta_3 Gini_{it} + \beta_4 GDIV1 + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

Where in the above model:

- $GDiv_{it}$: The divorce growth rate in province i and period t
- α: The intercept
- un_{it}: The unemployment rate in province i and period t
- Inf_{it}: The inflation rate in province i and period t
- $Income_{it}$: The per capita income in province i and period t
- $Gini_{it}$: The Gini coefficient or income distribution inequality in province i and period t
- $GDIV1$: The first lag of the divorce growth rate
- ε_{it}: The error term

Panel data is a combination of both time-series and cross-sectional data, typically used in econometric analysis to study relationships between variables over time while accounting for cross-sectional heterogeneity. When a lag of the dependent variable is included as an explanatory variable, we are dealing with a dynamic panel model. In this case, to solve the endogeneity problem—i.e., ensuring no correlation between the lagged explanatory variable and the error term—the Generalized Method of Moments (GMM) is used to estimate these models. The GMM method is a statistical technique used to estimate parameters in dynamic panel data models. It uses moment conditions,

which are functions of the sample data. This estimator minimizes the distance between the population moment conditions and their sample counterparts. This method for estimating dynamic panel data models involves two stages [32].

System Estimation: In this stage, the model is transformed by taking differences or first-differencing the original equation(s) into a set of moment conditions. These conditions represent the relationship between endogenous variables and their lagged values, as well as any exogenous or predetermined variables [32].

Estimation: The transformed model is estimated using GMM by minimizing the distance between the sample moments and their theoretical counterparts. This involves selecting appropriate weighting matrices and instrumental variables to ensure a consistent and efficient estimation [32].

In this study, we examine the divorce rate in 30 provinces of Iran from 2008 to 2018, allowing us to utilize the panel data approach. The descriptive statistics of the economic variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Variables in the Provinces of Iran for the Period 2008–2018

Variable	Maximum	Minimum	Mean	Median	Variance	Std. Dev.
Unemployment	22	7	11.96	11.2	9.79	3.13
Inflation	39.12	7.18	19.16	15.707	86.09	9.27
Per Capita Income	789890.66	865.51	54441.14	40243.75	5055724078	71103.61
Gini	0.46	0.37	0.41	0.40	0.001	0.043

As observed in Tables 1 and 2, among the provinces of Iran during the 2008-2018 period:

- The highest unemployment rate belonged to Kermanshah Province in 2016, and the lowest unemployment rate belonged to Markazi Province in 2014.
- The highest Gini coefficient and inequality belonged to Sistan and Baluchestan province in 2009, and the lowest Gini coefficient belonged to East Azerbaijan province in 2010.
- The highest inflation rate belonged to Qazvin Province in 2013, and the lowest inflation rate belonged to Kermanshah Province in 2016.
- The highest per capita income belonged to West Azerbaijan Province in 2015, and the lowest per capita income belonged to Tehran Province in 2016.

4 Model Estimation Results

Before estimating the model, we examine the stationarity of the research variables. The results in Table 3 show that all model variables are stationary at the 1% significance level; therefore, the panel data model is estimated subsequently.

Given the stationarity of the variables, the model estimation proceeds. The results are presented in Table 4.

The results of the model estimation can be expressed as follows:

Table 2: Average Divorce and Marriage by Province

Province	Average Divorce	Average Marriage
East Azerbaijan	7516	41181.2727
West Azerbaijan	5679.18	35605.8182
Ardabil	2924.778	13188.6667
Isfahan	8985.7273	42924.2727
Ilam	679.8	6090.778
Bushehr	1772	9867.5455
Tehran	32646.364	97283.27273
Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari	1124.818	10905.9091
South Khorasan	1032.9	7925.25
Razavi Khorasan	15540.4	69229
North Khorasan	1666.2	10995.545
Khuzestan	7764.18182	51431.8182
Zanjan	1944.909	12936.364
Semnan	1058	5296.364
Sistan and Baluchestan	1785.63	32319.72
Fars	8376.90	47794.27
Qazvin	2401.9091	12196.636
Qom	2727.72	11172.72
Kurdistan	3754.182	18852.909
Kerman	4729.33	24179.5
Kermanshah	4627.81	21756.09
Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad	1561.90	9565.72
Golestan	3078.63	20824.09
Gilan	5875	25056.27
Lorestan	4361.45	21381.09
Mazandaran	6987.18	30271.54
Markazi	3175.72	14420.45
Hormozgan	2455.5	15875.2
Hamadan	2455.5	20406.72
Yazd	1351	10292.72

1. **Unemployment has a positive and significant effect on divorce growth:** Unemployment increases the probability of divorce occurrence because this factor creates economic hardship and increases psychological stress between couples, which subsequently escalates their conflicts. Unstable employment renders individuals unable to provide the minimum necessities for a shared life. Unemployed men experience lower levels of understanding and communication with their families, and their relationships are generally more strained. They are supported by their families, leading to more arguments and less cohesion in family relationships. Rising unemployment reduces the expected utility of staying in a marriage and affects the material and non-material dimensions of life; the material dimension is the individual's income, and the non-material dimension is their identity. From a psychological perspective, it also imposes significant psychological pressure on the family, confirming the psychological approach. Increased male unemployment prevents men from fulfilling their rights and duties, thus increasing intra-family conflicts. During recessions and unemployment crises, the effects

Table 3: Stationarity Test of Variables Used in the Model Using the Levin, Lin & Chu Test for the Period 2008–2018

Variable	Levin, Lin & Chu Test Statistic	P-Value	Test Result
Unemployment	-4.34	0.00	Stationary
Inflation	-7.34	0.00	Stationary
Per Capita Income	-51.73	0.00	Stationary
Gini Coefficient	-11.37	0.00	Stationary
Divorce Growth	-9.79	0.00	Stationary
First Lag of Divorce Growth	-9.22	0.00	Stationary

Table 4: Model Estimation Results Using the GMM Method

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	P-Value
First Lag of Divorce Growth	-0.209	0.0028	-73.48	0.00
Per Capita Income	-0.0000001	0.00000003	-4.68	0.00
Gini Coefficient	2.89	0.12	22.77	0.00
Unemployment	0.007	0.001	5.16	0.00
Inflation	0.006	0.0003	17.87	0.00
J-Test (Sargan Test)	17.48			0.42

of unemployment on divorce become apparent as economic pressures separate couples. If unemployment increases, economic hardship, psychological stress, and conflicts between couples intensify, and divorce consequently increases.

2. **Inflation has a positive and significant effect on divorce growth:** Inflation affects the standard of living and family welfare and impacts shared living costs and post-divorce living costs; therefore, it can also affect divorce. This effect, based on the psychological stress theory, is in one direction, or based on the cost-of-divorce approach, is in the opposite direction. The instability of the community's economic system also affects the economic conditions within the family. Inflation raises the cost of living, reducing purchasing power and family welfare. Consequently, couples become unable to save, which impacts their quality of life. Iranian society faces issues such as inflation, recession, and sanctions, with families grappling with these problems. These economic pressures place a double burden on poorer families. Rising inflation also increases housing costs, and housing is one of the most critical needs of married life. An inability to secure housing increases conflicts and disputes between couples. Thus, inflation creates tensions between couples, intensifies disagreements, and affects the divorce rate.

3. **The first lag of divorce growth has a negative and significant effect on divorce growth in the current period:** In other words, when a high growth rate of divorce occurs in the previous period, the divorce rate will experience a lower growth rate in the subsequent period.

4. **Per capita income has a negative and significant effect on divorce growth:** Per capita income has a negative and significant effect on divorce growth; meaning that with an increase in per capita income in Iran, the divorce growth rate has significantly decreased. An increase in per capita income creates economic prosperity, which provides labor market opportunities for individuals; people have many job opportunities, thus reducing the divorce rate. On the other hand, income also affects GDP and housing.

5. **The Gini coefficient, or income distribution inequality, has a positive and significant effect on divorce growth:** An increase in the Gini coefficient signifies an increase in income inequality in society, which also exacerbates poverty. Increased inequality raises intra-family conflicts, which increases injustice in society and subsequently raises the divorce rate. This coefficient is a number between 0 and 1, where zero signifies perfectly equal income distribution, and one signifies absolute inequality in income distribution.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

With the social transformations that have occurred in recent decades, the family system has faced changes and challenges that have threatened its foundation. Divorce is one such threat, a complex phenomenon in which various factors, including cultural, social, and economic, play a role. Thus, divorce is a collection of issues and problems that, as a social blight, affect both the family and society. The present study investigated the economic roots of divorce in the provinces of Iran during the period 2008–2018 using the Generalized Method of Moments (GMM).

Based on the results obtained, the variables of inflation, unemployment, and income distribution inequality had a positive and significant effect on divorce, but per capita income had a negative and significant effect on divorce. These results are consistent with previous empirical evidence indicating that unemployment, inflation, income instability, and income inequality can intensify marital instability and increase divorce [11, 14, 29–31, 33–40]. However, they differ from studies reporting weaker, counter-cyclical, or context-dependent relationships between macroeconomic conditions and divorce [9, 41, 42].

Therefore, economic factors play a crucial role in creating divorce and conflicts between couples, so the country's economic policymakers should adopt policies to improve the economic and welfare conditions of the country. These policies may include:

1. Improving the business environment, which leads to economic growth, thereby increasing family income generation, which has positive effects on preserving marriages. Responsible institutions should create jobs and facilitate entrepreneurship for the unemployed.

2. Controlling the money supply to curb inflation.

3. Paying unemployment insurance to the unemployed to prevent an increase in marital conflict and family breakdown.

4. Reducing the Gini coefficient through income redistribution policies such as taxation: One of the primary functions of taxation is wealth redistribution. Tax policies and the performance of a tax system can reduce inequality in society. One of the main ways to reduce wealth inequality and make the tax system fairer is the targeted implementation of wealth taxes through collecting taxes from the wealthy and redistributing them to the needy.

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