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THE DIFFERENCES IN SUBJECTIVE QUALITY OF LIFE AMONG THE DIVORCED/SEPARATED IN ABU DHABI

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Abstract

This study attempts to understand various aspects of the quality of life (QoL) of the divorced and the separated in Abu Dhabi. A descriptive analysis approach was adopted to explore the differences in some selected QoL indicators, including health perceptions, depressive feelings, social connection, happiness, and life satisfaction between and among various demographical categories of the divorced and the separated. This research drew data from the second cycle of the Quality-of-Life survey in Abu Dhabi conducted in 2019-2020, in which a total of 3,192 divorced or separated individuals participated. The analysis followed mainly a descriptive approach, presenting the means of each well-being variable by various respondent categories. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was also used to examine the degree of differences. The results show that the divorced/separated generally exhibit a significantly low level of QoL attributes. Moreover, the divorced/separated show significant differences in those selected QoL indicators when gender, age, nationality, income, residence, and education are factored in. Most of the lowest QoL scores were reported by females, lower-income groups, younger age groups, residents of the Al Ain region, low education groups, and non-Emiratis. Policy implications and future research directions are recommended.

Keywords: Divorced, Separated, Quality of Life, Happiness, Life Satisfaction, Abu Dhabi

1. Introduction

Despite the rapid advance in living standards worldwide, the condition of failed marriage remains deplorable, with immense impact on the quality of life (QoL) of those affected. Divorce or separation is a significant life stressor that can impact individuals' lives psychologically, economically, and physically (Bulloch *et al.* 2017). In the literature, well-being research on the divorced and separated usually focused on specific variables or dimensions. More specifically, they covered their happiness (Amato, 2010; Argyle, 1989; Tebeka *et al.* 2016; Waite *et al.* 2003), life satisfaction (Bourassa *et al.* 2015; Lucas *et al.* 2003; Mastekaasa, 1994; van Scheppingen and Leopold, 2020), health and mental health (Amato, 2000; Hewit *et al.* 2012; Nielsen *et al.* 2014), social connection (Albeck and Kadar, 2020; Doolittle and Deutsch, 1999; Kelly and Emery, 2003), and socio-economic variables (Amato, 2000; Das, 2013; Leopold, 2018; Winkle and Leopold, 2021). Although there has been proliferous research on the effects of divorce, few empirical studies have examined how marriage status impacts the quality of life and the differences in divorcee's well-being based on gender, socioeconomic status, level of education, and level of family income (Barrett, 2000; Simon, 2002; Symoens *et al.* 2013).

Data recently compiled by the Abu Dhabi Department of Community Development (DCD) show that more than half of all Emirati couples in Abu Dhabi face divorce within the first four years of marriage and the leading causes of divorce include poor conflict resolution skills, poor communication skills, and lack of quality time spent together (DCD, 2021a). Similarly, according to the UAE Statistics Centre, "50% of marriages between Emirati couples in the country do not make it past three years, and 28% end in the first year" (UAE Statistics Centre, 2021). As a result, the DCD and the Family Development Foundation (FDF) have combined forces to launch an initiative to raise awareness about the importance of seeking professional help at the first signs of marriage conflict to reduce divorce rates in the early stages of marriage. The DCD also declared some social challenges that prompted the development of a more specific family well-being strategy (DCD, 2021b). The strategies mainly focused on the well-being of family and divorce, and marriage rates. Nevertheless, one of the most fundamental challenges is that the subject of divorce/separation and well-being has not received much research attention in Abu Dhabi.

The general objectives of this research are to further our understanding of the exceptional quality of life aspects among the divorced and separated in Abu Dhabi and to contribute to the development of relevant policy interventions. Those specific quality of life variables include life satisfaction, happiness, subjective self-rated health, subjective mental health, and social connection. Through investigating the differences of these selected well-being variables among groups of different marital status, we explore the differences associated with gender, nationality, education, age, income class, and region of residence in Abu Dhabi. Thus, this study contributes to the growing literature on the differences in subjective quality of life among the divorced/ separated in Abu Dhabi. The results of analysis may shed lights on the attention that needs to be given to this vulnerable group in terms of support and interventions. We believe that this research will allow policymakers to gain a more thorough outlook on divorce in Abu Dhabi and its effect on the various life features following the divorce.

2. Review of literature

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has warned of the evolving structure of modern families that has emerged from recent trends in divorce and the diminishing traditional family consisting of a married couple with children (OECD, 2011), which affects family relations and leads to changes in informal support networks. International empirical research has covered many aspects of the QoL of the divorced and separated, which are briefly reviewed here.

2.1. Life satisfaction

Several longitudinal studies addressed the effect of divorce on life satisfaction. These studies include different communities such as Dutch (Denissen *et al.* 2018), German (Lucas, 2005), and British (Clark and Georgellis, 2013). Most have concluded that divorce is associated with declines in life satisfaction or that life satisfaction declined in the years after divorce (Lucas *et al.* 2003; Luhmann *et al.* 2012). In a much-cited working paper, van Scheppingen and Leopold (2020) provided an overall picture of life satisfaction changes before and after divorce, showing "gradual declines in the years before the divorce, a sudden decline in the year of the divorce and gradual increases in the years after". The interaction between marital quality, status, and gender should be noted. Bourassa *et al.* (2015) found that women in lower-quality marriages would report the best life satisfaction outcomes upon separation/divorce, while divorced women in higher-quality marriages showed the lowest life satisfaction after divorce. van Scheppingen and Leopold (2020) used the German Socio-Economic Panel Study to compare divorcees' life satisfaction changes to changes in a control sample of non-divorcees and found that divorcees showed more considerable individual differences in change in life satisfaction compared with non-divorcees. Yárnoz-Yaben *et al.* (2018) analyzed Chilean and Spanish people's life satisfaction after divorce and revealed that age and time since separation were the predictors of life satisfaction for Chilean divorced people. In general, research shows that the widowed, divorced, or separated tend to have the lowest levels of life satisfaction compared with other groups (Dolan *et al.* 2008; Mastekaasa, 1994).

2.2. Happiness

In general, the empirical research suggests that divorce is often a stressful, dramatic life event with wide-ranging adverse effects on quality-of-life and happiness (Amato, 2010; Amato and Hohmann-Marriott, 2007; Hohmann-Marriott and Amato, 2008; Lorenz *et al.* 2006; Williams, 2009; Zhang and Hayward, 2006). On the other hand, cross-sectional studies reported that happiness is greater among married people than divorced ones (Argyle, 1989; Oswald, 1997; Waite and Gallagher, 2000). Waite *et al.* (2003) analyzed the association between marriage, divorce, and happiness and found that unhappily married families who had divorced were no happier than those who had stayed together. However, Gardner and Oswald (2006) stressed that such indication is not a persuasive reason to believe divorce reduces overall well-being. Lucas (2007) stressed that divorce is associated with adverse effects on children in both the short and the long term, as children of divorced parents often could not attain the same level of happiness before the divorce (Tebeka *et al.* 2016).

2.3. Health and mental well-being

Research stresses that divorce is strongly linked to specific health and overall mental well-being (Sander *et al.* 2020). More specifically, divorcees usually report poorer both physical and mental health with symptoms related to stress, anxiety, depression, and social isolation than the general population (Amato, 2000, 2010; Hald *et al.* 2020; Hewitt and Turrell, 2011; Hewitt *et al.* 2012; Kessing *et al.* 2003). For example, Booth and Amato (1991) used a three-wave American panel to illustrate that stress levels are high close to the divorce date but subsequently decline as time passes. Many also reported that divorce is correlated with more frequent doctor visitations and hospitalization (Nielsen *et al.* 2014), drug and substance use (Waite *et al.* 2009), higher suicide rates (Kposowa, 2000), and higher mortality risk (Kposowa, 2000; Sbarra and Nietert, 2009). Divorce could substantially influence the lives of all family members in various psychological and mental aspects (Al Ubaidi, 2017). Araújo and Lima (2016) reported the emergence of negative emotions and feelings for both parties in a marriage and the children during separation.

2.4. Social connection

Research indicates that divorce is expected to have adverse social effects for adults and children (Doolittle and Deutsch, 1999; Furstenberg and Kiernan, 2001). Many studies revealed the negative effect of divorce on spouses' relationships, social connections, and social networks (Aydin *et al.* 2018; Högnäs, 2020). Divorced couples may feel that their social circle narrows or faces the possibility of losing some of their friends, especially during such difficult times when they feel isolated and depressed (Amato and Hohmann-Marriott, 2007). Some studies further indicate that when a couple divorces, others no longer feel right to socialize with just one person (Albeck and Kaydar, 2020), resulting in reduced social networks. Children tend to suffer the most, especially with the probability of losing the mother or the father in the same house (Amato and Sobolewski, 2001). In addition, kids might experience negative emotional feelings as their parents fight more often during or before the divorce, making them feel losing loving relationships (Kelly and Emery, 2003).

2.5. The moderation of biographical characters and socio-economic status

Research confirms that the well-being features after divorce or separation may differ by individual characteristics and socio-economic circumstances (Amato, 2000; Pett and Vaughan-Cole, 1986). Some studies found no effect of age on subjective well-being, while some studies concluded the presence of a U-shaped age relationship (Blanchflower and Oswald, 2008; Rozer and Kraaykamp, 2013). Men and women may have different feelings when coping with psychological stressors after divorce (Das, 2013). Leopold (2018) pointed out that men were more vulnerable to short-term consequences of divorce in terms of subjective well-being, while many studies have documented the negative association between divorce and women's economic well-being (Winkle and Leopold, 2021). There seems to be substantial variation across cultures and countries of subjective well-being after the divorce between genders, as mixed results are reported (Meisenberg and Woodley, 2015; Vieira Lima, 2013).

Lower-income and lower education are usually found to be predictive of more mental and physical health (Barrett, 2000; Cohen and Finzi-Dottan, 2012; Metsä-Simola and Martikainen 2013; Perrig-Chiello *et al.* 2015; Symoens *et al.* 2013). Witter *et al.*'s (1984) meta-analysis suggested a modest net positive effect of education on well-being. In a recent study by Cipric *et al.* (2021), multilevel modeling was employed to investigate the mediation of education and income level to predict post-divorce health. The findings indicated that lower education and lower-income predicted worse post-divorce health over one year post-divorce and that education moderated post-divorce anxiety so that lower-educated experienced a more considerable reduction in symptoms of anxiety and depression over time. Sander *et al.*'s (2020) research show that lower age and higher income predicted better physical health among divorced men, whereas higher income predicted mental health among divorced women. Lee *et al.* (2020) concluded that economic conditions moderate life satisfaction and marital conditions, with pronounced adverse effects of lower income, particularly among separated/divorced.

In summary, the medium-term consequences of divorce are shown to be similar in terms of mental and physical health, economic well-being, social integration with friends and relatives, and feelings of loneliness (Ding *et al.* 2021; Roysamb *et al.* 2003). Amongst other determinants, previous research has focused on the association of divorce and selected well-being variables such as health, mental health, happiness, life satisfaction, social connections. In this current research, we seek to investigate the various aspects of QoL among the divorced and separated in Abu Dhabi, including their mental feelings, self-rated health, life satisfaction, happiness, and social connection. Further, we aim to broaden the scope by exploring the differences among groups with certain socio-demographics such as nationality and place of residence and gender, income level, and age.

3. Study design and methods

The study used data from the second cycle of the Abu Dhabi QoL survey conducted in 2019/2020. DCD developed the survey instrument in cooperation with the Statistics Department Abu Dhabi (SCAD). The study sample included residents across the three regions of Abu Dhabi: Abu Dhabi region, Al Ain region, and Al Dhafra region. The survey team made extra efforts to reach all community residents to achieve representative samples. The survey was available in Arabic, English, and six other Asian languages. In addition, the survey was distributed online. More than 50 survey links were created and distributed amongst the various segments of the community. Both ADDCD and SCAD were involved in distributing the survey links. ADDCD also sent encouraging calls to the communities, inviting their participation in the survey. Means of distribution included phone calls, messengers, emails, and social media. Survey representatives also appeared in several national TV newscasts to encourage participation. It should be added here that the online means of distribution facilitated reaching respondents who were not in the country at the time of distribution. A total of 72,481 responded to the online survey call, among whom 3,192 were divorced or separated individuals.

Certain variables were selected from the survey. The self-rated health variable was measured by responses to the statement "In general, how do you assess your current health status?" on a 5-point scale from poor to excellent. The construct of mental feelings was based on responses to four statements: feeling calm and peaceful, having lots of energy, downhearted and depressed, and rushed or pressed during the past four weeks, rated on a 5-point scale from never to always. A scale ranging from 0-10 was used for both happiness and life satisfaction. Four questions were used to construct the social connection factor. These questions are "How often do you meet socially with friends?", "In general, I am satisfied with my family life", "How often have you felt isolated from people around you in the last four weeks?", and "In general, I am satisfied with my relationships with other people I know". Where applicable, negatively worded phrases were recorded for analysis.

The analysis followed mainly a descriptive approach, presenting the means of each well-being variable by various respondent categories. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was also used to examine the degree of differences. The software (SPSS v.22) was used for the analysis (IBM Corp., 2020).

4. Results

The total number of respondents in the 2nd cycle of Abu Dhabi QoL survey was 72,481, which consisted of 13,823 singles (19.1%), 54,885 married (75.7%), 2,676 divorced (3.7%), 516 separated (0.7%), and 580 widowed (0.8%). Table 1 shows the characteristics of the divorced and separated in the study. The sample of the divorced and separated comprised of 3,192 participants, of which 79.32% were women. The average age of divorced women was 40.27 years (*SD*=8.384), while 40.26 years for men (*SD*=10.337). Over half of the participants had completed secondary school education (25.56%) or earned a bachelor's degree (30.23%). In addition, the survey attracted proportionately more full-time employed (58.57%), 35-44 years old (46.49%), residents of the Abu Dhabi region (69.61%), and Emiratis (69.49%). Overall, the distributions are representative of the Abu Dhabi population except for gender and nationality. The analysis used appropriately calculated weights to compensate for non-representations.

Table 1. Number of the participants (divorced or separated)

	Divorced	Separated	Total	Percent
Gender				
Male	519	141	660	20.68%
Female	2157	375	2532	79.32%
Employment status				
Full-time employment	1115	235	1350	58.57%
Part-time employment	70	14	84	3.64%
Self-employed	54	20	74	3.21%
Unemployed	316	35	351	15.23%
Retired	75	9	84	3.64%
Not in the labor force	320	42	362	15.70%
Education level				
Illiterate	59	11	70	2.19%
Below secondary school	298	51	349	10.93%
Secondary school	707	109	816	25.56%
Post high school training certificate	119	50	169	5.29%
College diploma	264	74	338	10.59%
Bachelor's degree	817	148	965	30.23%
Master's degree	358	57	415	13.00%
Doctorate degree	54	16	70	2.19%
Age				
15-19	10	10	20	0.63%
20-24	30	17	47	1.47%
25-29	188	40	228	7.14%
30-34	465	75	540	16.92%
35-39	644	118	762	23.87%
40-44	595	127	722	22.62%
45-49	359	73	432	13.53%
50-54	222	25	247	7.74%
55-59	97	22	119	3.73%
60 and above	66	9	75	2.35%
Region				
Abu Dhabi	1811	367	2178	69.61%
Al Ain	736	118	854	27.29%
Al Dhafra	83	14	97	3.10%
Nationality				
Emirati	1896	322	2218	69.49%
Non-Emirati	780	194	974	30.51%

4.1. Quality of life compared across different categories of marital status

Table 2 provides the means of QoL variables examined in the study for all marital status categories. For the eight positively worded variables (self-rated health, feeling calm and peaceful, having lots of energy, life satisfaction, happiness, often meeting socially with friends, satisfaction with family life, and satisfaction with relationships with other people), it is evident that either the divorced or the separated recorded the lowest means. The two groups also recorded the highest means of the three negatively worded variables (often feeling downhearted and depressed, feeling rushed or pressed for time, and often feeling isolated from people around you). It is worth noticing that the divorced and the separate group recorded the lowest means (below 3.0) for two variables related to mental feelings and social interaction with friends. On the other hand, the married reported the highest means of five positively worded variables, followed by the singles reporting the highest means of all other three positively worded variables and the lowest means of all three negatively worded variables. We also note that the widowed generally rated more favorably on these QoL aspects than the divorced and separated.

ANOVAs were performed to examine differences between the divorced and the separated groups on eleven well-being variables used in this study. We observed no significant differences except for two variables ("amount of quality time spent with your family" and "often

feeling isolated from people around you"). As a result, all further analyses were conducted by combining the divorced and the separated as one group.

Table 2. Means of QoL variables for the divorced/separated and others

QoL variables	Single	Married	Divorced	Separated	Widowed
Self-rated health	3.253	3.624	3.106	3.013	3.148
Feeling calm and peaceful	3.047	3.214	2.771	2.848	2.905
Having lots of energy	3.201	3.268	3.016	3.139	3.237
Often feeling downhearted and depressed (-)	2.771	2.874	3.094	3.119	2.902
Feeling rushed or pressed for time (-)	3.233	3.270	3.401	3.273	3.284
Life satisfaction	6.644	6.515	5.662	5.513	6.378
Happiness	7.138	7.241	6.816	6.433	7.495
Often meeting socially with friends	2.260	2.776	2.272	2.063	2.263
Satisfaction with my family life	3.992	3.873	3.583	3.271	4.034
Often feeling isolated from people around you (-)	2.287	2.602	2.726	2.735	2.463
Satisfaction with relationships with other people	3.824	3.766	3.686	3.540	3.899

4.2. Quality of life of the divorced/separated by gender

Table 3 shows the QoL variables, the associated f-scores, and the significant level for males and females. We used ANOVA to test the differences of QoL variables between genders. Females recorded higher means than men of happiness, satisfaction with family life. On the other hand, males reported a significantly higher mean of "often meeting socially with friends" and a lower mean of the negatively worded variable "feeling rushed or pressed for time." No significant differences were found concerning the other seven variables.

Table 3. Quality of life of the divorced/separated by gender – ANOVA

QoL Variable	F- score	Sig.	Gender	
			Male	Female
Self-rated health	0.248	0.619	3.118	3.086
Feeling calm and peaceful	1.901	0.168	2.849	2.767
Having lots of energy	0.539	0.463	2.997	3.042
Often feeling downhearted and depressed (-)	2.280	0.131	3.019	3.115
Feeling rushed or pressed for time (-)	5.091	0.024*	3.268	3.409
Life satisfaction	1.854	0.173	5.455	5.685
Happiness	14.294	0.000**	6.219	6.892
Often meeting socially with friends	45.248	0.000**	2.636	2.150
Satisfaction with my family life	21.401	0.000**	3.251	3.612
Often feeling isolated from people around you (-)	0.479	0.489	2.686	2.736
Satisfaction with relationships with other people	0.369	0.544	3.639	3.672

Note: ** significant at 0.01; * significant at 0.05.

4.3. Quality of life of the divorced/separated by nationality

Table 4 shows the ANOVA results for the two nationality groups (Emiratis and Non-Emiratis). Again, we notice specific significant differences. For example, Emiratis recorded a significantly higher mean of life satisfaction. In addition, the negatively worded variable (often feeling isolated from people around you) recorded values also favor Emiratis. Finally, Non-Emiratis recorded a significantly higher mean of "often meeting with friends". All other variables did not record significant differences between Emiratis and Non-Emiratis.

Table 4. Quality of life of the divorced/separated by nationality – ANOVA

QoL Variable	F- score	Sig.	Nationality	
			Emirati	Non-Emirati
Self-rated health	0.196	0.658	3.107	3.084
Feeling calm and peaceful	13.440	0.000**	2.899	2.722
Having lots of energy	21.768	0.000**	3.188	2.955
Often feeling downhearted and depressed (-)	11.863	0.001**	2.979	3.158
Feeling rushed or pressed for time (-)	0.039	0.843	3.376	3.386
Life satisfaction	9.931	0.002**	5.930	5.491
Happiness	1.029	0.311	6.665	6.815
Often meeting socially with friends	5.223	0.022*	2.150	2.289
Satisfaction with my family life	0.306	0.580	3.570	3.533
Often feeling isolated from people around you (-)	5.958	0.015*	2.628	2.776
Satisfaction with relationships with other people	0.037	0.847	3.672	3.663

Note: ** significant at 0.01; * significant at 0.05.

4.4. Quality of life of the divorced/separated by education

Table 5 shows the ANOVA results and the corresponding means of each category of respondents by education level. The hypothesis is that different educational attainment groups will differ in their reactions to the eleven QoL variables. The results show that significant differences exist for seven variables. The most considerable difference is recorded concerning life satisfaction with an F-score of 14.510. Master's degrees and Ph.D. holders recorded significantly higher life satisfaction scores than other groups. The illiterates scored the lowest (4.921 from a maximum of 10). The second-highest significant difference is the variable "often feeling isolated from people around you," with an F-score of 7.207. For all the variables that show significant differences, the illiterates and those with a below bachelor's degree education scored the lowest.

Table 5. Quality of life of the divorced/separated by education – ANOVA

QoL Variable	F-score	Sig.	Education				
			Illiterate	Less than BS	BS	MS	Ph.D.
Self-rated health	2.864	0.022*	2.675	3.049	3.136	3.222	3.079
Feeling calm and peaceful	4.125	0.002**	2.514	2.731	2.787	2.971	3.056
Having lots of energy	3.572	0.007**	2.806	2.977	3.055	3.190	3.371
Often feeling downhearted and depressed(-)	2.557	0.037*	3.225	3.156	3.059	2.978	2.771
Feeling rushed or pressed for time(-)	5.525	0.000**	2.944	3.300	3.509	3.465	3.400
Life satisfaction	14.51	0.000**	4.921	5.254	5.858	6.624	6.618
Happiness	0.045	0.996	6.857	6.744	6.766	6.816	6.853
Often meeting socially with friends	0.722	0.577	2.455	2.269	2.214	2.206	2.032
Satisfaction with my family life	1.067	0.371	3.074	3.573	3.537	3.506	3.563
Often feeling isolated from people around you(-)	7.207	0.000**	3.000	2.857	2.616	2.481	2.469
Satisfaction with relationships with other people	1.459	0.212	3.300	3.669	3.694	3.628	3.719

Note: ** significant at 0.01; * significant at 0.05.

4.5. Quality of life of the divorced/separated by age

Table 6 presents the ANOVA results and the corresponding means of each age category. A total of nine variables show significant differences. The highest F-score is recorded with regard to self-rated health with an F-score of 9.486. A significant difference is observed concerning the two negative variables (Often feeling downhearted and depressed, and often feeling isolated from people around you) with F-scores of 7.929 and 7.500, respectively. The most negative scores for the two variables are recorded for those 20 years old or less. The most positive feelings are observed for both variables from the older age groups (51-60 and 60+). Only two variables do not show significant age differences (having lots of energy and meeting socially with friends).

Table 6. Quality of life of the divorced/separated by age – ANOVA

QoL Variable	F-score	Sig.	Age					
			20 -	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	60+
Self-rated health	9.486	0.000**	3.313	3.458	3.148	2.941	2.995	2.658
Feeling calm and peaceful	4.046	0.001**	3.600	2.847	2.717	2.771	2.944	3.000
Having lots of energy	1.168	0.323	3.385	3.075	2.989	3.037	3.133	3.206
Often feeling downhearted and depressed(-)	7.929	0.000**	3.929	3.197	3.176	3.066	2.724	2.771
Feeling rushed or pressed for time(-)	4.309	0.001**	4.067	3.509	3.431	3.315	3.273	2.912
Life satisfaction	6.645	0.000**	6.615	5.359	5.388	5.722	6.587	6.382
Happiness	2.316	0.041*	7.909	6.720	6.536	6.927	7.143	7.152
Often meeting socially with friends	1.222	0.296	2.727	2.237	2.215	2.252	2.237	2.677
Satisfaction with my family life	4.440	0.001**	3.600	3.437	3.421	3.647	3.777	4.000
Often feeling isolated from people around you(-)	7.500	0.000**	3.091	2.933	2.853	2.600	2.416	2.344
Satisfaction with relationships with other people	4.154	0.001**	3.545	3.513	3.629	3.687	3.883	3.969

Note: ** significant at 0.01; * significant at 0.05.

4.6. Quality of life of the divorced/separated by income class

Table 7 portrays the ANOVA results and the corresponding means of each category of income class. Income class plays a significant role for the divorced since six variables exhibit significant differences (self-rated health, feeling calm and peaceful, often feeling downhearted and depressed, life satisfaction, often feeling isolated from people around me, and satisfaction with relationships with others). Life satisfaction is the variable with the highest significant difference (F-score of 8.952). The life satisfaction scores favor the middle-income class of the divorced and separated. Similarly, the middle-income class reported the highest mean of "feeling calm and peaceful" and lowest means of "Often feeling downhearted and depressed" and "Often feeling isolated from people around you." Respondents in the upper-income echelon provide the highest self-rated health for the other variables. The lower-income respondents reported the highest mean of the negative feeling of isolation from people around them.

Table 7. Quality of life of the divorced/separated by income class – ANOVA

QoL Variable	F-score	Sig.	Income class		
			Lower	Middle	Upper
Self-rated health	4.766	0.009**	2.964	2.995	3.164
Feeling calm and peaceful	7.297	0.001**	2.604	2.893	2.779
Having lots of energy	1.196	0.303	2.967	3.102	3.020
Often feeling downhearted and depressed (-)	4.133	0.016*	3.208	2.972	3.062
Feeling rushed or pressed for time (-)	0.104	0.901	3.481	3.517	3.475
Life satisfaction	8.952	0.000**	5.333	6.193	5.910
Happiness	2.867	0.057	6.634	7.261	6.797
Often meeting socially with friends	1.024	0.360	2.221	2.371	2.274
Satisfaction with my family life	2.992	0.051	3.468	3.619	3.659
Often feeling isolated from people around you (-)	3.450	0.032*	2.790	2.533	2.659
Satisfaction with relationships with other people	4.674	0.010**	3.613	3.770	3.777

Note: ** significant at 0.01; * significant at 0.05.

4.7. Quality of life of the divorced/separated by region of residence

Table 8 presents the ANOVA results and the corresponding means of each category of respondents by area of residence (Abu Dhabi region, Al Ain region, or Al Dhafra region). Considering the three regions in Abu Dhabi, significant differences are noted for two variables (feeling rushed and pressed for time and often meeting socially with friends). Respondents from Al Ain reported the highest frequency of meeting socially with friends. In addition, the divorced/separated residing in the Abu Dhabi region reported the highest level of feeling rushed or pressed for time, while those from Al Dhafra recorded the lowest level.

Table 8. Quality of life of the divorced/separated by region of residence – ANOVA

QoL Variable	F- score	Sig.	Region		
			Abu Dhabi	Al Ain	Al Dhafra
Self-rated health	0.489	0.613	3.084	3.113	2.967
Feeling calm and peaceful	0.214	0.807	2.791	2.759	2.810
Having lots of energy	0.061	0.941	3.032	3.045	3.000
Often feeling downhearted and depressed (-)	0.307	0.736	3.114	3.078	3.036
Feeling rushed or pressed for time (-)	3.891	0.021*	3.434	3.294	3.232
Life satisfaction	0.726	0.484	5.694	5.528	5.458
Happiness	1.382	0.251	6.834	6.619	6.348
Often meeting socially with friends	3.657	0.026*	2.185	2.358	2.190
Satisfaction with my family life	2.850	0.058	3.504	3.656	3.381
Often feeling isolated from people around you (-)	0.086	0.918	2.731	2.714	2.786
Satisfaction with relationships with other people	0.546	0.580	3.660	3.671	3.810

Note: ** significant at 0.01; * significant at 0.05.

5. Discussion

The well-being variables examined included self-rated health, feeling calm and peaceful, having lots of energy, life satisfaction, happiness, often meeting socially with friends, satisfaction with family life, and satisfaction with relationships with other people, often feeling downhearted and depressed, feeling rushed or pressed for time, and often feeling isolated from other people around. Compared to other groups, the divorced and separated in Abu Dhabi recorded the lowest means concerning all well-being variables covered in this research. This result is consistent with the general outcomes from similar international research (Barrett, 2000; Simon, 2002; Symoens *et al.* 2013).

In general, the divorced and separated recorded the lowest level of happiness. An abundance of studies reached the same conclusion (i.e., Amato, 2010; Hohmann-Marriott and Amato, 2008; Lorenz *et al.* 2006; Waite and Gallagher, 2000; Williams, 2009; Zhang and Hayward, 2006). The negative impact of an unhappy marriage on health and life, in general, is well documented. For example, Lawrence *et al.*'s (2019) research show that compared to a happily married couple, an unhappy couple is over twice as likely to report worse health and 40% more likely to die over the follow-up period. The Abu Dhabi study observed no differences in happiness by nationality, education level, region of residence, and income class.

More specifically, when we look closer at divorced/separated women and men, we do not find significant differences regarding self-rated health, some mental feelings (feeling calm and peaceful, having lots of energy, feeling downhearted and depressed), life satisfaction, feeling isolated, and satisfaction with relationships with others. There were no significant differences in self-rated health by gender, nationality, and residence about self-rated health specifically. Nevertheless, the illiterates and those aged 60+ recorded the lowest means. This present Abu Dhabi study also shows a significantly lower level of self-rated health by the lower-income class. Our results do not confirm the presence of a U-shaped age relationship (Blanchflower and Oswald, 2008). However, women recorded a significantly higher mean of happiness than men. This specific result where women tend to become much happier after their divorces than men are consistent with those revealed by other studies (Leopold, 2018). Men are not necessarily weak emotionally in comparison to women. However, they are less likely to express their emotional distress and are hesitant to reach out for support (Leopold, 2018). In addition, women recorded higher satisfaction with family life while recording significantly lower social meetings with friends.

The mean of self-rated health of the divorced and separated was the lowest compared to other categories of respondents. This result is consistent with existing literature (Amato, 2000, 2010; Ding *et al.* 2021; Hewitt *et al.* 2012; Hewitt and Turrell, 2011; Sander *et al.* 2020), which noted strong associations between divorce and adverse health outcomes. In addition, epidemiological studies have shown significant differences between married and separated individuals regarding mental and physical health risks. For example, separated/divorced men were more distressed and lonelier and reported significantly more recent illnesses than married men (Kiecolt-Glaser *et al.* 1988). On the other hand, married individuals are healthier, have better

mental health, require a shorter time for recovery from illness, and live longer than those who have never married, divorced, separated, or widowed (Dupre *et al.* 2009; Rogers, 1995). The significant links between marriage and health rely on the bond that connects these two elements, which research in the field calls "marriage protection". These "protection" effects work by promoting healthy behavior, increased material well-being, and more significant social support and connections, which help cope with stress and mitigate adverse health behaviors and consequences (Robles, 20014; Ross, 1995; Uchino, 2006).

Generally speaking, the results are consistent with other studies that found that many divorced and separated adults experience profound loneliness (Dykstra and Fokkema, 2007). However, noticeably, isolation or loneliness was more significantly felt by the lower-income segment of the divorced and separated, the youngest and oldest age cohorts (20 or younger and 60 or older), illiterates, and non-Emiratis.

The divorced and separated reported the lowest social connection variables (satisfaction with family life, relationships with other people, and often meeting with friends). Such anticipated results are consistent with other international findings (Albeck and Kaydar, 2020; Aydin *et al.* 2018; Doolittle and Deutsch, 1999; Furstenberg and Kiernan, 2001; Högnäs, 2020). More specifically, the 21-30 and 31-40 age cohorts reported the lowest level of satisfaction with family life. In addition, there were significant differences in the frequency of meeting with friends among the divorced and separated. The differences were noticed concerning gender, residence, and nationality. For example, higher frequencies were recorded for males, Emiratis, and those living in Al Ain; and there were significant differences in the level of satisfaction with relationships with other people among different income and age groups, where the lower-income group and the 21-30 age group recorded the lowest means. Socioeconomic status and coping skills are connected with well-being (Glasscock *et al.* 2013), and high earning capacity tends to increase the probability of marriage and decreases the probability of divorce (Ahituv and Lerman, 2007; Burgess *et al.* 2003).

The survey contained several items that were intended to reflect the psychological feelings of the respondents. The variable "feeling rushed or pressed for time" showed more negative effects on females, college degree holders, and young individuals. The variable of "feeling downhearted and depressed" recorded the lowest means for the middle-income segment and those aged 20 or less. In general, these findings are consistent with other studies that reported that divorcees usually exhibit poorer mental health with more symptoms related to stress, anxiety, and depression than the general population (Bracke *et al.* 2010; Colman *et al.* 2012; Hald *et al.* 2020; Hewitt and Turrell, 2011; Kessing *et al.* 2003; Nielsen *et al.* 2014).

The well-being variables examined included self-rated health, feeling calm and peaceful, having lots of energy, life satisfaction, happiness, often meeting socially with friends, satisfaction with family life, and satisfaction with relationships with other people, often feeling downhearted and depressed, feeling rushed or pressed for time, and often feeling isolated from other people around. Compared to other groups, the divorced and separated in Abu Dhabi recorded the lowest means concerning all well-being variables covered in this research. This result is consistent with the general outcomes from similar international research (Barrett, 2000; Simon, 2002; Symoens *et al.* 2013).

6. Conclusion

This study aims to augment our awareness and understanding of the quality of life aspects amongst the divorced and separated in Abu Dhabi. Overall, this group exhibited the significantly lower quality of life attributes than other groups. Moreover, the divorced and separated showed significant differences in those selected QoL attributes by gender, age, nationality, income, area of residence, and education. Most of the lowest QoL mean scores were reported by the lower-income class, females, youngest or oldest age cohorts, those residing in Al Ain, the illiterates, holders of degrees below bachelor's degrees, and non-Emiratis.

For policy-making implications, increased intervention is necessary to target the high-risk divorced and separated adults in Abu Dhabi. The results of this study call for calculated interventions designed to target the well-being of the divorced/separated in general and feelings

of loneliness in particular. For those who show a high level of stress, depression, and other negative psychological feelings that affect their life, community level of support, engagement, and integration may be necessary. More research should concentrate on these vulnerable groups in the Abu Dhabi community. More in-depth focus groups might be necessary to shed more light on improving the well-being of divorced and separated adults. Since children are the most vulnerable part of the divorce process, there is a need for future research to examine the impact of divorce on children's well-being in Abu Dhabi.

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