



Predicting the Probability of Divorce Based on Triangulation and Mindfulness in Married Female University Students

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DOI: [10.22037/anm.v33i3.46142](https://doi.org/10.22037/anm.v33i3.46142)

Submitted: 04 Jan 2024

Accepted: 07 May 2024

Published: 15 Jul 2024

Keywords:

Divorce
Triangulation
Mindfulness
Students

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How to cite:

Amirahmadi T, Jayervand H, Hooman F, Homaei R. Predicting the Probability of Divorce Based on Triangulation and Mindfulness in Married Female University Students. *Adv Nurs Midwifery*. 2024;33(3):15-20. doi: 10.22037/anm.v33i3.46142

Abstract

Introduction: Triangulation is a destructive pattern of communication where a third party becomes involved in a conflict between two people, often leading to an alliance with one against the other. Mindfulness is a mental state achieved by focusing one's attention on the present moment without judgment. By examining the relationship between these two factors on divorce probability, this research aims to identify potential early warning signs and intervention strategies.

Methods: This descriptive-correlational research investigated the relationship between divorce probability, triangulation, and mindfulness among married female university students in 2023. A convenience sample of 304 participants was selected from the entire population of married female students. The research instruments included the Divorce Probability Questionnaire, Triangulation Scale, and Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire. SPSS-27 software was used to analyze the data collected from this study. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and stepwise regression to determine the associations between these variables.

Results: The findings revealed a strong positive correlation between triangulation and the probability of divorce ($r = 0.41$, $P < 0.001$). Conversely, mindfulness was negatively associated with divorce probability ($r = -0.37$, $P < 0.001$). Collectively, triangulation and mindfulness explained 45% of the variance in divorce probability among the sample of married female university students. However, triangulation was found to be a more significant predictor of divorce than mindfulness.

Conclusions: These findings suggest that addressing triangulation patterns, such as involving a third party in marital conflicts, is crucial for enhancing marital satisfaction and reducing the risk of divorce. While mindfulness may offer some protective benefits, its impact on divorce probability appears to be less significant in this context. These findings emphasize the need for targeted interventions that address triangulation and promote mindfulness to support marital well-being among Iranian female university students.

INTRODUCTION

The family unit is a cornerstone of both individual and societal well-being. While diverse family structures exist, a strong family system offers essential support, stability, and a sense of belonging [1]. The global rise in divorce rates underscores the significant emotional toll of marital breakdown, often leading to social isolation,

despair, and mental health issues such as depression and loneliness [2].

A key concept in the study of divorce is the probability of divorce, which represents the likelihood of a couple's marital dissolution [3]. Divorce is a multifaceted process, often initiated by an emotional crisis and culminating in the adaptation to a new lifestyle and role.

Globally, the average divorce rate is 1.8 per 1,000 individuals. Doherty's 2023 study, utilizing Iranian Civil Registration data, revealed a substantial increase in the divorce rate over a decade, with a rate of 2.8 times the baseline. Furthermore, research indicates that Iranian students experience an emotional divorce rate of 7.6%, and the overall prevalence of emotional divorce in the population is reported to be 11.7% [4].

The prevalence of divorce has far-reaching economic, social, and psychological consequences for individuals [5]. As a social issue involving the legal dissolution of marriage, divorce can have profound and enduring impacts on both individuals and society. Moreover, the repercussions of divorce often extend beyond the immediate family unit, with children experiencing significant and potentially irreversible harm [6].

Mindfulness, a cognitive process involving the non-judgmental observation of one's thoughts and feelings, can be a valuable tool for coping with the challenges associated with divorce. By cultivating mindfulness, individuals may be better equipped to manage stress, regulate emotions, and foster resilience during this difficult transition [7, 8]. Mindfulness offers an effective method for mitigating stress and mental pressure. Mindfulness entails focusing one's attention on the present moment, rather than dwelling on the past or future [9]. Mindfulness is defined as a non-judgmental, descriptive, and present-moment awareness of the experience occurring in the field of one's attention; moreover, this concept involves acknowledging and accepting the experience [10]. In line with this, Ghazanfari Shabankare et al. [11] reported that a negative relationship exists between mindfulness and emotional divorce among married university students.

Triangulation, in the context of marital relationships, is a destructive communication pattern where a third party becomes involved in a conflict between a couple, often leading to an alliance with one spouse against the other. This can create tension, confusion, and resentment within the relationship. Dimensions of triangulation include the third party, which could be another person, a pet, a substance (like alcohol or drugs), or an activity (like work or hobbies); the role of the third party, which may be seen as a mediator, a scapegoat, or a source of support for one of the spouses; and the intensity of the triangulation, which can range from subtle to overt, with varying degrees of impact on the relationship [12].

In recent years, in response to rising divorce rates and marital dissatisfaction, researchers have sought to understand the underlying causes. They have found that emotions and effective relationship skills play a significant role in enhancing marital quality [13]. According to Minuchin's theory of triangulation, a child or third party becomes allied with one parent against the other [14]. The nature, flow, time, and place (what, how, when, and where) describe relationships but do not address their causes [15, 16]. In this context, Rejali

and Yousefi [12] investigated the relationship between wisdom, emotional experience towards a substance-abusing spouse, triangulation, and spousal adaptability. The findings revealed a significant correlation between wisdom, emotional experience of the substance-abusing spouse, and triangulation and spousal adaptability, such that spouses of substance abusers exhibited higher levels of triangulation and lower levels of spousal adaptability. Understanding the factors associated with the probability of divorce is crucial for developing effective psychological interventions to enhance marital intimacy and prevent marital dissolution. While numerous studies have explored the factors influencing divorce, the specific context of Iranian female university students offers a unique opportunity to investigate the impact of triangulation and mindfulness on marital stability. This population faces specific cultural and societal pressures that can significantly impact marital dynamics. Despite the growing body of research on divorce, a gap persists in understanding the interplay between triangulation, mindfulness, and divorce probability within the Iranian cultural context. By examining these factors, this study aims to contribute to the development of culturally sensitive interventions to support Iranian couples and enhance their marital well-being.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive-correlational design to examine the relationship between triangulation and mindfulness, and the probability of divorce among married female students at Azad University of Ahvaz in 2023. A convenience sample of 304 participants was recruited, consisting of married female students who met the inclusion criteria of being married, living with their spouse, and providing informed consent. Those refusing participation or submitting incomplete questionnaires were excluded. The initial sample size was calculated using a power analysis based on the expected difference between the groups on the dependent variable (divorce probability), the desired level of statistical significance ($\alpha = 0.05$), and the desired probability of detecting a significant effect (0.80). Based on these factors, a sample size of 315 participants was determined. After excluding incomplete responses and outliers, 304 participants remained for the final analysis. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board prior to initiating the study. Participants were then administered the research questionnaires, with any ambiguities clarified. To ensure confidentiality, participants were assured that their data would be used anonymously. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study. Participants were provided with a detailed informed consent document outlining the study's purpose, potential risks and benefits, procedures, right to withdraw, and data confidentiality. Sufficient time was

allotted for participants to review the document and ask questions. Only after providing informed consent did participants agree to participate in the study.

Instruments

Divorce Probability Questionnaire (DPQ)

The Divorce Probability Questionnaire (DPQ) is a 14-item self-report measure designed to assess individuals' inclination towards divorce. Respondents rate each item on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from "Never" to "Always." The DPQ comprises two subscales: the desire to leave and the desire to compromise. Higher scores on the DPQ indicate a greater inclination towards divorce. A score between 14 and 33 suggests a low inclination, 33-66 indicates a moderate inclination, and 66-98 suggests a high inclination [17]. The DPQ has demonstrated acceptable psychometric properties. In the study by Hosseini-Ghidari et al. [18], the questionnaire exhibited a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.90, indicating strong internal consistency. In the present study, the Persian version of the DPQ was used, and its Cronbach's alpha coefficient was similarly high at 0.83, further supporting its reliability.

The Triangulation Scale

This scale assesses the tendency to deal with relationship problems by involving a third party and consists of 16 items. The scale has three subscales: negative triangulation, supportive triangulation, and triangulation with children. Scoring is on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The total score range is 16 to 80, with higher scores indicating a greater tendency to deal with relationship problems through triangulation [19]. In the study by Dehghani and Yousefi [19], the internal consistency of the scale, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was reported to be 0.87, indicating acceptable reliability. In the present study, the Persian version of the Triangulation Scale was used, and its reliability was 0.81 using Cronbach's alpha.

The Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ)

The Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), developed by Baer et al. [20], was used to assess mindfulness levels among participants. Mindfulness is defined as a non-judgmental and accepting awareness of the present moment, distinct from rumination, worry, and automatic behavior. The FFMQ consists of 15 items rated on a 6-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater mindfulness. The total score ranges from 15 to 90. Previous research has established a strong internal consistency for the FFMQ, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.86 [21]. In the current study, the Persian version of the FFMQ was used, and its reliability was further confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, resulting in a coefficient of 0.85.

Data Analysis

SPSS-27 software was used to analyze the data collected from this study. At the descriptive level, mean and standard deviation were used, and at the inferential level, Pearson correlation coefficient and stepwise regression were employed to examine the prediction of divorce probability among students based on triangulation and mindfulness.

RESULTS

The sample comprised 304 married female students enrolled in undergraduate, masters, and doctoral programs at Azad University of Ahvaz. The average participant age was 32.17 years (SD= 4.75). The majority of students were pursuing Master's degrees (60.5%), followed by Undergraduate (34.2%) and PhD (5.3%) programs. Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis for the study variables. The data for all variables exhibited a normal distribution, as evidenced by kurtosis and skewness values within the acceptable range of -1 to 1 (Table 1).

Table 1. Means, standard deviations (SD), skewness, and kurtosis of the variables

Variables	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Probability of divorce	55.30	11.75	-0.26	-0.46
Triangulation	48.02	10.55	0.09	-0.04
Mindfulness	52.61	10.01	0.39	-0.54

Table 2. Pearson correlation coefficients among the research variables

	Probability of divorce	
	r	P
Triangulation	0.41	0.001
Mindfulness	-0.37	0.001

Table 3. Results of simultaneous regression analysis

Model	Predictor variable	F	R	R ²	B	SE	β	t	P
1	Triangulation	73.67	0.41	0.17	-0.37	0.12	0.36	4.26	0.001
2	Triangulation and mindfulness	42.21	0.49	0.24	-0.45	0.16	0.48	1.13	0.001

Table 2 presents the correlation coefficients among the study variables. The results indicated a positive and significant correlation between triangulation ($r = 0.41$)

and divorce probability. Mindfulness, on the other hand, showed a negative and significant correlation with divorce probability ($r = -0.37$). To determine which

variable had a stronger predictive power on divorce probability, stepwise regression analysis was conducted. Triangulation and mindfulness were entered as predictor variables, and divorce probability was the dependent variable. The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 3.

As shown in Table 3, in the first model, triangulation had the greatest influence on predicting divorce probability. The correlation coefficient between this variable and divorce probability was 0.41, and this variable was able to account for 17.0% of the variance in divorce probability. In the second model, after triangulation, mindfulness was entered into the equation. The combined correlation coefficient of these two variables with divorce probability was 0.49, and these two variables were able to account for approximately 24.0% of the variance in divorce probability. The addition of the mindfulness variable increased the predictive power by 7.0%. Given the order of variable entry, triangulation, with a standardized beta of 0.36, had the greatest contribution in predicting changes in divorce probability, followed by the variables of triangulation and mindfulness with a standardized beta of 0.48, which played a significant role in predicting divorce probability.

DISCUSSION

The study sought to determine the extent to which triangulation and mindfulness predict divorce probability among married female university students. The first finding showed a positive and significant relationship between triangulation and divorce probability among married female students. This finding is consistent with the results of previous studies by Fatemi et al. [22], and Song et al. [23]. To explain this finding, it can be argued that triangulation refers to the presence or influence of a third person or external factor in a marital relationship, which can lead to problems and tensions in the relationship. This variable can manifest in various ways, such as children, emotional or physical relationships with a third party, the involvement of family members or friends in marital issues, or the creation of external pressures in the marital relationship. Within this framework, it is assumed that the higher the level of triangulation in a relationship, the higher the probability of divorce. The presence of triangulation can lead to increased conflict, decreased trust, and increased dissatisfaction in the relationship [23]. In other words, the presence of a third person or external factors can disrupt the balance of the relationship, increase tensions, and lead to serious problems in communication between spouses, which in turn increases the probability of divorce. Therefore, analyzing the level of triangulation and its impact on dissatisfaction and conflict in a relationship can help predict the probability of divorce.

Triangulation can lead to negative emotions such as jealousy, distrust, and ongoing tension between spouses. These negative emotions can decrease marital satisfaction and consequently increase the probability of divorce [24]. The higher the level of triangulation, the higher the probability of divorce. In other words, triangulation acts as a destructive factor in marital relationships, which can lead to increased dissatisfaction and serious problems. Consequently, examining and reducing triangulation can be considered a key strategy in marital counseling programs and interventions to prevent divorce [14]. This approach can help improve marital relationships and reduce the probability of divorce.

Another finding of this study was that mindfulness had a negative and significant relationship with the probability of divorce among married female students. This finding is consistent with the results of previous studies by Ghazanfari Shabankare et al. [11], and Mandal and Lip [25]. To explain this finding, it can be said that mindfulness refers to the intentional and non-judgmental attention to the present experience and can help better manage stress and problems in marital relationships. Individuals with high levels of mindfulness have a greater ability to manage conflicts and communicate effectively. Mindfulness can help individuals to view marital issues and problems with more calmness, avoid harmful emotional reactions, and experience improved communication quality [26]. The higher an individual's level of mindfulness, the lower the probability of divorce. In other words, mindfulness can act as a protective factor against divorce. By using mindfulness techniques, individuals may develop greater abilities to solve problems and manage their emotions, leading to a decreased probability of divorce. Confirmation of this hypothesis can lead to the development of educational and intervention programs to increase mindfulness in married individuals and improve marital relationships.

Improving mindfulness skills can help better manage marital problems and reduce the probability of divorce [7]. Mindfulness can have profound and positive effects on marital relationships. Individuals who practice mindfulness in their daily lives typically have a greater ability to manage stress and conflict. Mindfulness helps these individuals to face marital problems and differences with greater calmness, avoid impulsive and emotional reactions, and achieve effective and empathetic communication in marital relationships. The more skilled an individual becomes in applying mindfulness techniques and focusing on the present moment, the less likely divorce is in the marital relationship. Mindfulness may lead to decreased dissatisfaction, reduced conflict, and increased marital satisfaction, all of which can decrease the probability of divorce.

The findings of this study have significant implications for health consultants and clinical educators working with couples. By understanding the roles of triangulation and mindfulness in marital dynamics, clinicians can develop targeted interventions to address triangulation patterns, improve relationship satisfaction, and promote mindfulness practices. This knowledge can be incorporated into marriage counseling programs and relationship education workshops to equip couples with the tools and skills needed to navigate challenges, build healthier relationships, and manage stress effectively. Moreover, these findings highlight the broader importance of addressing triangulation and promoting mindfulness in health and well-being interventions, as they can have significant benefits for individuals' mental health and overall quality of life.

The study's findings may be limited by its reliance on a convenience sample of married female students from a single university, potentially restricting the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design of the study makes it challenging to establish causality between the variables. Longitudinal research would be necessary to determine the temporal sequence of events and strengthen causal inferences. Additionally, the use of self-report questionnaires may introduce biases, potentially affecting the validity of the findings.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relationship between triangulation, mindfulness, and divorce probability among married female university students. Our findings suggest that triangulation is a stronger predictor of divorce than mindfulness. This indicates that addressing triangulation patterns, such as involving a third party in marital conflicts, is a more effective strategy for enhancing marital satisfaction and reducing the risk of divorce among married women. While mindfulness may offer some protective benefits, its impact on divorce probability appears to be less significant in this context. Further research is needed to explore the underlying mechanisms through which triangulation and mindfulness influence marital outcomes and to develop targeted interventions that address triangulation and promote mindfulness.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to all participants who generously contributed their time and insights to this research, enabling its successful completion.

FUNDING

This research received no specific grant or financial support from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the design, conduct, or publication of this research.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

TA: Study concept and design, acquisition of data, analysis and interpretation of data, and statistical analysis. HJ: Administrative, technical, and material support, study supervision. FH and RH: Critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of Islamic Azad University-Ahvaz Branch (code: IR.IAU.AHVAZ.REC.1403.002).

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