



Social factors contributing to divorce among couples in Mtwara Mikindani Municipal, Mtwara Region, Tanzania

Joseph M Kitesho¹, Agnes Nzali², Sosthenes Ruheza³

¹ University of Iringa

Email: jkitasha6@gmail.com

² University of Iringa

³ University of Iringa

ABSTRACT :

This study aimed to examine social factors contributing to marital divorce in Mtwara Mikindani Municipal Council, Tanzania. The study used a Qualitative approach and a cross-sectional qualitative design. In-depth interviews, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions were used for data collection. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis. Results indicate that infidelity, poor communication, childlessness, emotional abuse, and alcoholism were major social factors influencing divorce among respondents. These social problems weakened trust, intimacy, and cooperation between spouses, ultimately making it difficult for marriages to succeed. The study recommends the need for awareness campaigns to challenge harmful gender norms, stigma, and interference from extended family in marriages; community leaders and social workers should promote the values of mutual respect, trust, and open communication between couples.

INTRODUCTION

The family is the building block of society, and marriage serves as a foundation pillar (Khabibullaevich, 2021). Hence, marriage is a social institution that unites people in a special form of mutual dependence to form and maintain a family. As a social practice entered into through a public act, religious or traditional ceremony, it reflected the purposes, character, and customs of the society in which it had been found (Geertz, 2017).

Divorce is a legally established and judicially regulated process that formally terminates a marriage deemed unworkable by one or both spouses, allowing them the opportunity to remarry (Walker *et al.*, 2020). In 2023, the global average divorce rate was approximately 1.8% per 1,000 people, based on data from 56 countries, impacting families and societies across diverse cultures. This phenomenon arises from a variety of factors, including annoyance, anxiety, frustration, infidelity, poor communication, poverty, early marriage, and addiction (Elena, 2018; Maximillian & Babune, 2024). Arendell (2023) adds that recent trends show a notable rise in divorce rates worldwide, with one in ten marriages ending in divorce.

In Africa, particularly in South Africa, divorce rates were among the highest globally, especially among individuals aged 18–35 (Statistics South Africa, 2017; Bezuidenhout, 2017). Similarly, Tanzania had experienced a noticeable increase in divorce cases. In Tanzania, different sources discuss the trend of divorce; however, they do not offer the specific rate of divorce. For instance, the National Bureau of Statistics (2022) reports that 3.7% of the population aged 15 and above were divorced in the 2022 census, a rise from 2.9% in the 2012 census. The court records, as reported through Research Gate (2021), indicate a rise in divorces recorded by the Registration, Insolvency and Trustee Registration Agency (RITA), from 397 in 2018 to 523 in 2021. Furthermore, RITA (2024) adds that in 2024, there were about 675 registered divorces,

According to Trichal (2024), about 3% of Tanzanians aged 15 and above were divorced, with a higher prevalence among females. Citizen News (2017) reports that, between 2008 and 2015, Tanzania's divorce rate nearly doubled, and rising from 1.1% to 2.1%.

Regionally, Mtwara stands out with a divorce rate of 4.8%, higher than the national average of 3% (Dunor & Urassa, 2017). Despite this alarming trend, there is a notable lack of region-specific research on the factors leading to such a magnitude. Given the rising divorce rates and the scarcity of focused studies, this research aimed to examine the social factors contributing to marital divorce in Mtwara-Mikindani Municipality. Understanding these factors would help develop targeted strategies to mitigate the divorce rate and strengthen family structures in the region.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Literature Review

This study was guided by Social Exchange Theory (SET), which argues that individuals form and maintain relationships when the perceived rewards outweigh the costs, and they dissolve relationships when the costs exceed the benefits (Homans, 1961). In marriage, rewards may include love, trust, and companionship, while costs may involve conflict, abuse, or unmet expectations. When partners perceive that their sacrifices are not reciprocated or their expectations are unmet, they may experience dissatisfaction and ultimately pursue divorce.

According to Homans (1974), repeated rewards strengthen commitment, but when rewards decline or are unequal, frustration and aggressive responses

are likely. Foa and Foa (1974) further emphasized that both tangible resources (such as money and goods) and intangible resources (such as affection and respect) shape marital stability. In contexts where social factors such as infidelity, lack of communication, extended family interference, and childlessness create more costs than rewards, marriages are particularly vulnerable to breakdown.

In the case of Mtwara Mikindani Municipal Council, SET helps explain why couples separate when the expected social benefits of marriage companionship, children, trust, and respect are undermined. When individuals realize that marriage no longer provides the anticipated rewards but instead brings distress and unmet expectations, they are more likely to seek divorce. Thus, SET provides a useful framework for understanding how social factors contribute to marital instability and eventual divorce in the study area.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

2.2.1 Social Factors Contributing to Marital Divorce among Couples

According to Amato (2014), marital divorce occurs when one or both spouses come from a family that had a history of divorce. Families that had a long history of divorce put marriages under more stress. Amato (2014) found that children of divorced parents were more likely to experience divorce after marriage, and this risk increases significantly if the spouse they marry also comes from a divorced home. Amato also found that if the woman had witnessed a parental divorce, her chances of getting divorced increased to 59%. The chances of divorce nearly tripled to 189 % when both spouses experienced parental divorce. (Adu, 2023).

A study by Enang (2023) contends that a factor that could cause divorce was the age at first marriage. Those who marry for the first time in their teens were prone to marriage breakdown because the partners were usually less mature intellectually, emotionally, and experientially in their teenage years than when older, and thus were probably less likely to make sound marital choices. In this study, some factors were adapted from SET that include social factors such as infidelity, poor communication, and childlessness. In addition, alcoholism will also be included as a social factor in this study.

2.2.1 The influence of Poor Communication among Couples on Divorce

Communication difficulties contribute to marital divorce. According to Mohlatlole and Shirindi (2018), effective marital communication brings stability to a marriage. Similarly, Nyarks and Hope (2022) highlighted that stable marriages depend on effective communication. This suggests that communication in marriage is like a bridge that enables spouses to connect in the marriage. When spouses communicate well, the door to mutual knowledge and understanding is opened, allowing for a deeper level of understanding (Udoh, 2025).

Therefore, poor communication was one significant reason many marriages end in divorce due to a gradual decline in communication. Over time, couples often fall into a routine where meaningful conversations diminish. If this decline goes unchecked, toxic patterns could develop, causing one or both partners to withdraw from essential dialogue, ultimately leading to divorce.

2.2.2 The link between Childlessness on Marital Divorce

Childlessness may cause anxiety, distress, and frustration in marriage and subsequently lead to divorce. "In African culture, any marriage that was not blessed with children was not considered to have achieved its aim" (Olaniyi, 2015). Childlessness was not acceptable in many societies that place a high value on children. It was assumed that when a couple could not bear children, there was nobody to remember them. Their genealogical line would disappear. That was why any man or woman who had no children was not yet considered to be a fulfilled wife or husband. Marriage was therefore contracted to keep the family line going, arguing the importance of procreation in marriage (Smart, 2013). Procreation was the absolute way of ensuring that a person was not cut off from personal immortality. Unfortunately, it was the woman who was blamed for childlessness. Olaniyi (2015) stated that Marriage was not fully recognized or consummated until the wife had given birth. First pregnancy becomes, therefore, the final seal of marriage, the sign of complete integration of the woman into her husband's family and kinship circle.

2.2.3 Alcoholism

Believe it or not, alcohol consumption was a significant factor contributing to the dissolution of many marriages. Studies show that alcohol misuse could impact communication, accountability, and other aspects of a relationship, leading to increased conflict and, ultimately, divorce (Kulak *et al.*, 2025). A study revealed that an increase of one liter of alcohol per capita brings about an increase in the divorce rate of about 20%. This finding contrasts with results using expenditures as the aggregate alcohol measure, which show that an increase of 1/1,000 in the divorce rate leads to a 10% increase in alcohol expenditures (Brainerd & Malkova, 2024). The abuse of alcohol within marriages could give rise to countless problems, including financial strain and emotional turmoil. Additionally, alcohol abuse could lead to intense arguments and, in some instances, physical violence, further complicating the challenges surrounding divorce. Violence further complicates the challenges surrounding divorce.

2.2. 4 The influence of Infidelity on Marital Divorce

In any society, whether early or modern, infidelity has been a problematic issue in marriages. In African society, infidelity was regarded as a serious offense. Scott *et al.* (2013) found that 59.6% of individuals reported that infidelity was the second leading cause of divorce, after lack of commitment. The majority of couples with apparent infidelity in their relationships tend to lose their partners. Infidelity is often seen as a critical turning point that leads to the deterioration of marital relationships. In many African countries and cultures, while infidelity by married men was usually forgiven by their wives, infidelity by married women was considered taboo and unforgivable, often resulting in the breakdown of marriages (Adu, 2023). Participants reported that infidelity was a major reason for divorce, especially when their partners boasted about cheating and showed no regard for their feelings (Ameyaw *et al.*, 2023). This indicated that open bragging about infidelity and disregard for the participant's feelings contributed to the issue. These findings align with Adams, who found that infidelity can have a devastating impact on a marriage. The study showed that infidelity can cause feelings of betrayal, anger, and hurt, which undermine trust and respect within the relationship and ultimately lead to divorce (Adams, 2017).

2.3 Conceptual Framework

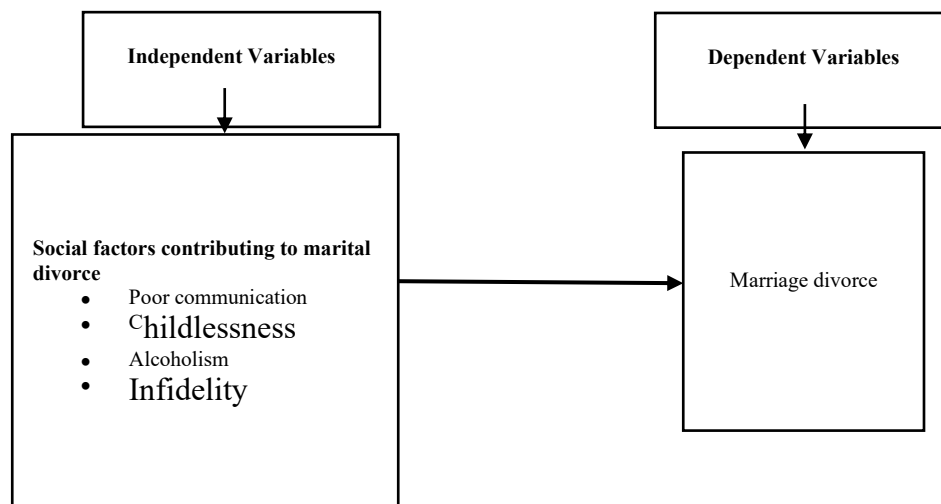


Fig.1: Conceptual Framework of the study; Source: Researcher, 2025

3. STUDY AREA AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Area

Mtwara region in Tanzania Mainland has a population of 1,634,947 people, with more than half (52.5%) being females (858,165 people) and 47.5% (776,782 people) males. The regional population grew at an average annual rate of 2.5% between 2012 and 2022. At this rate, the population of Mtwara is expected to double in the next 28 years, by 2041. The population remains mostly rural, with 76.3% living in rural areas and 23.7% in urban areas, according to the 2022 Tanzania National Census. Mtwara Mikindani Municipal Council covered about 260 square kilometers. The study was conducted in Mtwara Mikindani Municipal Council, specifically in the wards of Reli, Rahaleo, Chuno, Majengo, and Vigaeni. The Mtwara region is located in the southern part of Tanzania. These wards were selected to represent others since Mtwara Mikindani is a large area and has similar social and cultural behaviour. Mtwara Mikindani had been chosen as the case study because of the high rate of divorce in the area. Also, the area was selected due to accessibility in terms of transport and financial capability, which enabled the researcher to collect data and accomplish the study in time.

3.2 Research Approach

The study employed a qualitative research approach. The approach helped the researcher collect detailed information from the participants and provided explanations of the findings. The approach was selected due to the nature of the study objectives that demand explanatory information on factors contributing to divorce. The approach provided a clear, comprehensive, in-depth data collection and analysis on the practice of marital divorce among couples in Mtwara Mikindani Municipal Council.

3.3 Research Design

The study used a descriptive research design using only a qualitative research approach. The study employed a descriptive approach because it requires a description of the characteristics of the information and the respondents involved in this study.

3.4 Population of the Study

Participants of the study were couples who had divorced. In addition, the Social Welfare Officer, Ward Executive Officers, a police gender desk officer, religious leaders (i.e., Pastor and Sheikh), and a Community Development Officer from Mtwara Mikindani Municipality were involved as key informants.

3.5 Sample Size

The study consisted of a sample size of thirty participants. The purposive sampling techniques were used to obtain the couples who experienced divorce. The study also involved 5 key informants, namely a social welfare official, ward executive officers, a police gender desk officer, religious leaders, and a community development officer.

3.6 Data Collection

3.6.1 In-depth interview

To ensure reliable data collection, different methods were employed. A key informant interview was conducted with social welfare officers, community development officers, ward executive officers, Police gender desk officers, and religious leaders (pastors and sheikhs). The interview instrument was developed in English and then translated into Kiswahili because the key respondents preferred to use Kiswahili for better understanding, to gain insights, and to share their experiences regarding social factors leading to marital divorce.

3.6.2 Focus Group Discussion

Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) was used to collect data from divorced couples in Vigaeni and Chuno wards. Each FGD consisted of six participants. The technique was used to get an in-depth understanding of the factors contributing to marital divorce. The researcher used two FGDs, where the first group was for divorced couples and the other one was for both divorced and some key informants, like Social Welfare Officer, Community Development Officer, religious leaders, and Ward Executive Officer.

3.6.3 Data analysis

The study employed content analysis to analyze the collected data. The data analysis involved five steps: first, systematically collecting and organizing data from interviews and focus group discussions. Next, the data were analyzed according to factors, with each data point interpreted and thematically transcribed. Finally, the data were summarized and compiled into a report that presents the results of the analysis, with the data shown as narrative text based on the social factors used in the study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 The Contribution of Poor Communication to Divorce

Poor communication emerged as a key social factor contributing to divorce among couples in Mtwara Mikindani Municipality. Both interviews and focus group data revealed that ineffective communication was not only common but also highly damaging, leading to emotional disconnection, frequent misunderstandings, and ultimately the failure of marriages. A recurring theme was the inability to openly express feelings, resolve conflicts constructively, and engage in respectful dialogue, which significantly weakened marital trust and intimacy.

The participants during the FGD session explained that;

"I felt like talking to myself. Even when I cried, he didn't care. His silence was worse than shouting. I needed a partner who could listen, but instead, I got a stranger in my own house". (FGD with divorced couples, 21st June 2025).

A participant reported feeling marginalized in decision-making processes, where one partner made key family decisions without consultation.

Our communication was very poor during our marriage, as he was making decisions alone without involving me; he treated me like a child who did not have a say... we did not agree on anything. (FGD with divorced couples, June 17th, 2025).

Another participant expressed a similar frustration: *"Even when it comes to major things like relocating or taking a loan, he would decide without involving me. I felt like a stranger in my marriage"* (Interview with divorced woman, June 17th, 2025).

Another woman in her late twenties, with secondary education, reported:

We were like roommates. He would leave and come back without saying a word. If I asked where he went, he would shout or ignore me. Eventually, I stopped asking. That silence was the beginning of our end. (FGD with divorced couples, 21st June 2025).

The psychological toll of such communication breakdowns was echoed by a male participant who shared: *"She thought I didn't love her, but the truth is, I didn't know how to communicate love. I thought working hard and providing was enough. But now I see I should've said something, anything, to show I cared".* (FGD with divorced couples, 21st June 2025).

Also, participants stated that communication started well but changed over time, particularly as one partner's social or economic status evolved.

At the beginning, our communication was good, but after he got a job, he started to throw hurtful words at me. I was starting to doubt my health, as he degraded my dignity. I couldn't continue anymore. (FGD with divorced women, June 17th, 2025).

My wife mocked me with sarcastic words and never involved me in anything. Even when she wanted to buy furniture, I was not informed. I think she did it because I was jobless, and I lost value in her eyes. (Interview with divorced man, June 17, 2025).

A key informant, a social welfare officer, explained that most cases reported in the office involved communication grievances:

In many reports, either a wife or a husband says, 'We only speak during arguments.' Some men say they can't understand their wives because every talk ends in accusations. We try to mediate, but if communication is broken for years, most give up and opt for divorce. (Interview with Social Welfare Officer, 21st June 2025).

Similarly, a religious leader recounted a case where:

The husband told me, 'Every time I try to talk, she brings up old mistakes. I feel judged, not listened to.' He said he couldn't heal in a home where he felt constantly attacked. And the wife? She said he never apologized or admitted when he was wrong. They spoke, but never connected. (Interview with a religious leader, 21st June 2025).

Findings further revealed that some partners resorted to communicating through third parties, especially relatives, which created room for misinterpretation and external interference. A participant stated: *Whenever we had a problem, she called her sister or mother instead of talking to me. So I started doing the same. Before we knew it, the whole family was involved in our marriage. That killed everything.* (FGD with divorced couples, 21st June 2025).

Stakeholders such as community leaders and welfare officers echoed similar concerns. The Ward Executive Officer from Vigaeni Ward said:

Many couples come here complaining about insults, contempt, and being ignored in conversations. Some men insult their wives when they ask about household expenses, and this has contributed to increased cases of divorce. (Interview with Ward Executive Officer, June 17th, 2025).

The Social Welfare Officer shared:

We see many cases where wives report that their husbands don't listen or only respond with sarcastic remarks. At the same time, men complain of being denied access to their children and being disrespected when they raise concerns. Communication has completely broken down in such families. (Interview with Social Welfare Officer, June 17th, 2025).

The Police Gender Desk Officer confirmed: *Every week, we receive several cases related to poor communication, especially sarcastic or insulting language from ex-spouses during child support discussions. It's a recurring cause of long-term conflict.* (Interview, June 17th, 2025).

3.2 The Contribution of Childlessness to Marital Divorce

Childlessness has emerged as a significant social factor contributing to divorce among couples in the Mtwara Mikindani Municipality. Insights from interviews and focus group discussions indicated that many participants linked the absence of children to emotional distress, social stigma, familial pressure, and, ultimately, the disintegration of marriages. Childlessness was frequently perceived as a failure within the marriage, particularly attributing blame to the woman, which led to feelings of rejection, isolation, and even accusations of being cursed or infertile.

Couples reported experiencing pressure from in-laws, community stigma, and emotional strain due to the inability to conceive. One woman during the interview session shared, *"My in-laws pressured my husband to divorce me, saying I was just eating their food without bringing any child to the family"*. (Interview with a divorced woman, 18th June 2025).

Similarly, another participant revealed, "After four years without a child, my husband married another woman without telling me". (Interview with a divorced couple, 18th June 2025).

Also, during the focus group discussion divorced woman with a secondary education shared her painful experience:

After three years of marriage without a child, my husband started changing. He was not the same loving man I married. He stopped coming home regularly and started sleeping elsewhere. When I asked what was wrong, he just said he had no time to waste on a barren woman. His family kept saying I had eaten their wealth for nothing. I tried everything: hospitals, prayers, even traditional medicine, but nothing changed. Eventually, he divorced me because of childlessness. (FGD with divorced couples, 18th June 2025).

Another woman with a primary education also narrated her ordeal during the focus group:

I was told by my mother-in-law that if I didn't give birth within a year, they would bring in another wife. After two years without conceiving, my husband married another woman. He changed and told me I was no longer useful. I felt rejected and unwanted. That's when I decided to leave because I couldn't take the emotional torture anymore. (FDG with divorced woman, 18th June 2025).

Moreover, during the focus group discussion, a man who had divorced due to childlessness reported:

I loved my wife, but my parents and relatives were too much. They kept saying, 'You are wasting your life with a woman who can't give you children.' Eventually, I started believing them. The pressure was unbearable. In the end, I gave in and divorced her, not because I hated her, but because I was tired of fighting everyone. (FGD, 18th June with divorced couples 2025).

An interview with a religious leader from one of the local mosques provided a broader community perspective:

Many people come here for prayers because they believe God will bless them with children. But when prayers don't bring results quickly, the same people return asking for guidance on divorce. One man told me, 'She prays every day, but I don't see a child. I think she is cursed.' I tried to counsel them, but the stigma is too strong. (Interview with a religious leader, 18th June 2025).

Similarly, during an interview with a community development officer stated:

We frequently handle cases where couples divorce because of childlessness. Unfortunately, the blame almost always falls on the woman. One woman cried in my office and said, 'I'm treated like a stranger in my home. They no longer greet me. They say I bring shame.' This kind of rejection and discrimination leads to frustration and ultimately divorce. (Interview with a Community Development Officer, 18th June 2025).

Furthermore, during an interview session, the social welfare officer added:

There is a deep cultural belief in this community that marriage is not complete without children. In most divorce files I have reviewed, you will see reasons like 'no child since marriage,' or 'family insists I marry again to get a child.' One man said during his counselling session, 'What is the use of a marriage without a child?' (Interview with Social Welfare Officer, 18th June 2025).

Additionally, in many patriarchal societies, infertility is culturally associated with women, regardless of the actual medical cause. This gender bias leads men to deny responsibility for infertility, placing the blame solely on women. The findings from both interviews and focus group discussions support this.

When I suggested that we both go for fertility testing, my husband refused. He shouted, saying I am the woman, so the problem must be mine. Eventually, he started calling me barren and forced me to leave. (FGD with divorced couples, 18th June 2025).

Furthermore, pressure from in-laws and society was also reported as a major contributor to divorces linked to childlessness. Families, especially the husband's side, often exert pressure on the man to abandon the wife if she cannot conceive. *"My mother-in-law told me bluntly, 'If you can't give my son a child, don't waste your time here.' My husband couldn't defend me. I had to leave"*. (FGD with divorced Woman, 18th June 2025).

Chimbwanda and Ncube (2020) note that in African family systems, children are viewed as vital links between generations. The inability to produce heirs is often viewed as a failure that reflects poorly on the entire family lineage.

Moreover, a woman with a primary education recounted how her childlessness often exposed her to ridicule and isolation from her neighbors and even religious communities. This emotional abuse intensified the tension within her marriage. She shared, *"Even my neighbours used to mock me. They claimed I was destroying my husband's family. I began to avoid the market and social events out of shame"*. (Interview, 18th June 2025).

Ngwenya and Tlou (2022) explain that the stigma surrounding infertility diminishes self-esteem, heightens psychological stress, and strains relationships to the point where separation can occur.

Another divorced woman explained how childlessness was often seen as related to spiritual or superstitious beliefs, like witchcraft, curses, or punishment by ancestral spirits. These beliefs often caused men to look for other partners or to divorce their wives. She remarked, *"They claimed I was bewitched,*

which is why I couldn't conceive. My husband began to fear me and secretly married another woman". (Interview with a divorced woman, 18th June 2025).

A study by Okonjo and Eze (2021) noted that spiritual explanations for infertility have led to the dissolution of numerous African marriages, as partners frequently make drastic decisions influenced by community pressure and irrational fears.

Additionally, a male respondent expressed feelings of emotional distress, hopelessness, and diminished intimacy resulting from prolonged childlessness. He stated, *"We used to be very close. But after three years without a child, we began to fight constantly. We even forgot why we fell in love in the first place"*. (Interview with a divorced man, 18th June 2025).

These findings reinforce the idea that societal expectations and cultural norms heavily influence perceptions of marriage and childbearing. In line with this, Olaniyi (2015) emphasized that childlessness in African societies often brings shame and rejection, especially for women, leading to emotional distress and broken homes. A study by Inhom and Patrizio (2015) contends that infertility is not just a cause of emotional pain for couples; it also results in social stigma, especially in much of the developing world, where motherhood is believed to constitute a primary part of a woman's identity in a patriarchal society. This stigmatization often leads to dissatisfaction within marriages and even divorce. According to Gerrits (2016), infertility is seen in many African communities as a social failure rather than just a medical issue, with women bearing the majority of the blame. Marital relationships are often strained by pressure from in-laws, extended families, and society in general, which can lead to divorce. Similarly, Chibatata and Malimba (2016) noted that in Sub-Saharan Africa, experiencing infertility increases the likelihood of being abandoned, entering into polygamous relationships, or getting divorced. Their research in South Africa showed that childlessness was linked to marriage dissolution due to social pressures to have children and ensure continuity of family lines.

A study conducted by Naab *et al.* (2019) discovered that in Ghana, couples facing infertility frequently endure diminished marital satisfaction due to external pressures from extended families. This stress, along with feelings of not being good enough, often leads to the end of a marriage. Furthermore, Okonofua (2021) said that infertility can cause mental health problems like depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, which can make couples less emotionally close. Not being able to get pregnant may be seen as a failure of marital roles, which can drive spouses apart and make divorce more likely. This supports the statement by Nwosu and Ugochukwu (2021), who noted that in many African societies, infertility is viewed not just as a medical problem but as a social flaw that endangers marital stability. Similarly, Smart (2023) argued that procreation is viewed as a central goal of marriage in many African cultures, and childlessness is often equated with failure, not just of the marriage but of the individuals involved. Additionally, the study by Mokgatle and Moloi (2023) found that infertility adversely affects the emotional well-being of couples and often leads to persistent conflict, increasing the risk of divorce. Moreover, the study by Maeko (2024) found that infertility leads to stigma and psychological distress, making it hard for couples to maintain a healthy relationship. The study highlights that the emotional toll of childlessness weakens the marital bond and may lead to polygamy or complete separation. The overall results indicate that childlessness is not only a personal challenge but also a socially amplified issue that attracts judgment, pressure, and interference from extended families and communities.

3.3 The Contributions of Alcoholism to Marital Divorce

The findings of this study indicate that alcohol misuse significantly contributes to marital breakdown and eventual divorce among couples. Participants repeatedly cited the effects of alcoholism as central to issues of neglect, irresponsibility, physical abuse, emotional disconnection, and financial instability.

One participant shared a heart-wrenching account:

My husband used to be responsible, but when he started drinking heavily, everything changed. He became violent, wouldn't provide for the children, and used all the money on alcohol. When he drinks, I was beaten multiple times, and he becomes paranoid. He accuses me of cheating and refuses to touch me. Then he goes out and sleeps with other women. I couldn't tolerate the insults and humiliation anymore, so I filed for divorce. (Interview with a divorced woman, 18th June 2025).

Another participant in the focus group discussion emphasized the disintegration of trust and communication due to alcoholism: She reported that;

Whenever my husband drank, he would accuse me of cheating. He would shout at me in public and tell our neighbours I was a bad wife. Sometimes he slept outside, and when I questioned him, he'd say I should leave if I were not happy. Eventually, I did. (FGD with divorced women, 18th June 2025).

Also, one woman quoted that:

When my husband came home drunk, I would hide in the bedroom with my children. I couldn't trust him. He would break things, shout, and sometimes hit me. I reached a point where I was scared to live in my own house. That's not a marriage. (FGD with divorced women, 18th June 2025).

Furthermore, the link between alcoholism and intimate partner violence was emphasized by a participant who reported that; *Most of the time, he got home late and drunk. He would shout, break things, and sometimes slap me over small issues. The children were scared of him. That's when I decided to move out. I wanted peace for me and my children.* (FGD with divorced woman, 18th June 2025).

Another participant reported emotional abandonment as a result of alcohol abuse: He quoted that.

My wife said I had changed completely. I was always drunk or tired, never at home, and when I was home, I didn't care about anything. She said she felt alone in the marriage. I didn't blame her when she left me. (FGD with divorced man, 18th June 2025).

During an interview, a respondent shared: *My wife began drinking heavily after she lost her job. She became distant and argumentative. Our home became a place of shouting matches and resentment. We divorced because I couldn't live in that chaos anymore.* (Interview with divorced man, 18th June 2025).

This type of behaviour was echoed by other participants. One respondent during an interview reported that:

Alcohol destroyed me. I lost my job, and I lost my wife. I wasn't violent, but I neglected her. I forgot birthdays, ignored her calls, and never apologized. I didn't realize how much damage I was doing until she packed and left. (Interview with divorced man, 18th June 2025).

Community leaders also observed that many divorces, particularly among young couples, stemmed from unaddressed alcohol dependency. A community development officer explained:

I've witnessed many young marriages fail within the first two years. The most common issue? Alcohol. Some men drink excessively, disappear for days, and return only to blame their wives for problems they created. It's heartbreaking. (Interview, Community Development Officer, 18th June 2025).

Additionally, the social Welfare officer also expressed concern over the increasing trend of divorce by saying that;

In my office, we see at least three divorce cases each week related to alcohol. It's concerning. Some men vanish for days, leaving their wives to handle everything. When they come back, they're aggressive and unapologetic. This kind of irresponsibility tears families apart. (FGD with Social Welfare Officer, 18th June 2025).

The gender desk police officer also noted that alcohol-fueled violence was common in divorce cases: She reported that;

We handle many cases of domestic violence linked to alcohol use. Wives report physical abuse when their husbands come home drunk. In many cases, this is not a one-time event. It becomes a cycle that eventually drives women to file for divorce. (Interview with Police Gender Desk Officer, 18th June 2025).

During the focus group discussion, a divorced woman with a primary education said,

Alcohol use contributed to neglect of responsibilities, including financial duties and parenting. She added, "My ex-husband would take the little money we had and spend it on drinks. We had debts piling up. I had to start borrowing food for the kids. When I confronted him, he told me he needed alcohol to relax. I knew I had to leave before things got worse. (FGD with divorced woman, 18th June 2025).

Furthermore, another man with a primary education reported,

Alcohol misuse disrupted sexual relations and emotional intimacy in our marriages. My wife said I didn't satisfy her emotionally anymore. She said I was always tired, drunk, or emotionally unavailable. She accused me of loving alcohol more than her. After months of fighting, she left. (FGD with divorced man, 18th June 2025).

These findings are further supported by the study of Mbagara (2013), who argues that alcohol misuse is a key driver of domestic violence, infidelity, and financial instability, all of which fuel marital breakdown. This aligns with findings by Laslett *et al* (2017), who emphasized that alcohol-related harm extends beyond the drinker, affecting spouses and children through neglect, aggression, and economic deprivation, often resulting in divorce. According

to Templeton *et al* (2017) put it that, alcohol abuse often interacts with other marital stressors such as unemployment, poverty, or mental health problems, intensifying their effects and making divorce more likely. This suggests that alcohol misuse not only contributes directly to marital dissolution but also amplifies other existing marital challenges. Similarly, Marshal (2021) explains that alcohol problems often lead to poor emotional regulation, which escalates conflict between spouses and reduces marital satisfaction. In many cases, one partner's drinking becomes the central issue in the marriage, eventually driving the relationship toward divorce. Along a similar view, Ncube and Mabaso (2022) added that alcoholism often leads to financial instability and emotional disconnection, two factors highly correlated with marital failure. Alcohol misuse often exacerbates pre-existing marital tensions and magnifies small disagreements into unmanageable conflicts. Brainerd and Malkova (2024) argued that alcohol-related problems, especially among men, correlate with increased rates of intimate partner violence and abandonment, particularly in socioeconomically challenged households. Further, Studies show that alcohol misuse could impact communication, accountability, and other aspects of a relationship, leading to increased conflict and, ultimately, divorce (Kulak *et al.*, 2025). The abuse of alcohol within marriages could give rise to countless problems, including financial strain and emotional turmoil. Additionally, alcohol abuse could lead to intense arguments and, in some instances, physical violence, further complicating the challenges surrounding divorce.

3. 4 The Contribution of Infidelity to Marital Divorce

Infidelity became a major theme in the study, with participants identifying it as one of the most common and emotionally upsetting causes of divorce. The findings suggest that extramarital affairs are increasingly becoming normalized in some communities, especially when one partner justifies or downplays their actions, leading to a significant loss of trust and intimacy. Notably, the study showed that men were more often reported as being unfaithful, frequently involved in "michepuko"—a slang term for secret romantic or sexual relationships outside of marriage.

One female participant expressed her frustration as she said;

What will you do if a man commits adultery? Nothing can be done to this man. The worst thing is that every man is a traitor to his wife. She added, "It wasn't just the cheating that hurt. It was the way he bragged about it, like he had won something. He said, 'You should be thankful I'm still married to you while I can get others outside.' That killed every piece of love I had left. (Interviewee with divorced woman, 18th June, 2025).

Another participant illustrated the reality of public infidelity:

You see this man? This is not his wife but his mistress. He left his wife and children and was taken by this woman. Yes, he had extramarital affairs, and after that, their relationship was never normal again. At that stage, her wife had had enough of him, and this just fueled the situation even worse because of the type of people he was cheating on with. (Interviewee with divorced woman, 18th June, 2025).

A woman who had experienced infidelity said:

I got married to my husband four years ago. After a while, I discovered he was cheating on me and even had a child out of wedlock without telling me. When I confronted him, he couldn't even apologize. The first time I forgave him, I truly believed he would change. But the second time, I felt like a fool. Trust was gone. We lived like strangers. That's when I decided enough is enough. I had no choice but to leave. (Interview with divorced women at Majengo Ward, June 2025).

Another participant during the focus group discussion explained:

Yes, my husband had extramarital affairs, and after that, our relationship was never the same. When I first met him, he was a very respectful man who had high moral ground, but while in marriage, he was the opposite. He was someone who did not have respect at all, especially for women. He did not even respect or listen to his parents, as they tried talking to him several times, but he would not listen. I was deeply hurt, especially by the kind of women he was involved with. I reached a breaking point and filed for divorce. (FGD with divorced woman, June 2025).

It was also revealed that many men see infidelity as less serious when committed by themselves, but unacceptable when done by their wives. This double standard continues to fuel mistrust and gender-based inequality in marital expectations. As one woman quoted;

When I fell in love with him, he was all gentle and seemed to be a modern man who was romantic, but after we got married, his character changed. During our marriage, he did not behave according to what I expected of a man to behave. He started beating me the first time

I found him cheating. When I said I'd leave, he laughed and said I'd never survive without him. I proved him wrong. (FGD with divorced Woman, 18th June, 2025).

In some cases, infidelity was normalized and even expected. A participant explained:

My brother used to tell me, 'Every man cheats. Just ignore it.' But how can I ignore when he brings women home and calls me jealous? That's not marriage, that's torture. She added that, Mhm ... he is someone who does not make a solid decision, as he is influenced very easily by his friends and family. (FGD with divorced Woman, 18th June 2025).

Some respondents linked their partner's infidelity to underlying problems such as job loss, lack of affection, or unmet expectations, while others blamed societal influences, peer pressure, and alcohol. A male respondent expressed:

When we started, she had good behaviour, and that demonstrated the reason why I married her. I married her because I liked her personality, and that made me love her, but along the way, her personality changed when I lost my job. She said she needed someone who could provide. Next thing, she's with a man from our street. I couldn't take it. I felt useless. (Interview with divorced man, 18th June 2025).

Another Man also expressed the emotional toll of being cheated on:

Yes, my ex-wife had extramarital affairs. I kept asking myself why she would do that while always saying I satisfy her sexually. That's when I realized women don't cheat just because of dissatisfaction; sometimes it's just lust. He added, "My ex-wife never noticed me anymore. No compliments, no touches. I felt invisible. Then someone else gave me attention, and I made the biggest mistake of my life. It cost me my family. (Interview with the divorced Man, June 2025).

A Ward Executive Officer recounted his experience: He quoted that;

My ex-wife was cheating, and even though I forgave her the first time, she repeated it. After I lost my job, things worsened. I tried to talk to her, and she apologized, but it became a pattern, so I had to divorce her. (FGD, WEO from Rahaleo, June 2025).

A community development officer stated: *We handle many cases of divorce, and most of them start with cheating. Infidelity isn't just about sex; it's about power, ego, and disrespect. When one partner no longer values the other, trust collapses.* (Key Informant Interview with community development officer, 18th June 2025).

This study found a link between infidelity and divorce in partnerships, indicating that infidelity is widespread in the research region. Most couples are not faithful to their spouse and are cheating on their marriages. The study found that men are the leading group in having sexual relationships outside marriage. Most have the so-called "*michepuke*". The study also suggests that there was no proof that women in hunting and gathering communities were any less adulterous than males. Every participant in this research had to cope with a cheating spouse in their relationships, according to the findings.

These results align with the study by Leeker and Carlozzi (2014), who assert that infidelity is often motivated by both opportunity and desire. External influences such as alcohol consumption, peer pressure, and emotional neglect can heighten the likelihood of cheating, ultimately undermining the stability of the marriage. Additionally, Tuttle and Davis (2015) emphasize the fantasy aspect associated with extramarital affairs, where the unfaithful partner tends to idealize the other individual, using this illusion as a means of escaping the realities of their current relationship. From a psychological perspective, Munsch (2015) notes that many individuals engage in infidelity for pleasure rather than because of problems in their marriage. This observation is supported by male participants in the study, who indicated that their wives' infidelity was not necessarily due to sexual dissatisfaction but rather driven by desire or social influences. Similarly, Olaniyi (2015) posits that in many African cultures, marriage is seen as incomplete without children. Adams (2017) similarly observes that infidelity inflicts profound emotional pain, including feelings of betrayal, anger, and humiliation, which lead to a deterioration of trust and the foundational aspects of a marital relationship. Once trust is compromised, reconciliation becomes exceedingly challenging for many couples. Along a similar view, Smart (2023) supports this view, explaining that procreation is often tied to personal legacy and family honor, making childlessness a direct threat to marital stability. Unfortunately, the burden of infertility is usually placed on women, reinforcing gendered blame and societal rejection. Moreover, a study by Maeko (2024) also found that infertility leads to stigma and psychological distress, making it hard for couples to maintain a healthy relationship. The study highlights that the emotional toll of childlessness weakens the marital bond and may lead to polygamy or complete separation.

Infidelity also carries considerable social repercussions, particularly for women. Some participants described experiences of being blamed, shamed, or

abandoned, often facing a lack of social or emotional support to cope with the betrayal. In certain instances, accusations of infidelity led to domestic violence, highlighting the complex dangers associated with unfaithfulness in marriage.

4. CONCLUSIONS

It was found that issues such as infidelity, poor communication, childlessness, emotional abuse, and alcoholism were major causes of divorce. These social problems weakened trust, intimacy, and cooperation between spouses, ultimately making it difficult for marriages to succeed.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it is recommended that there is a need for awareness campaigns to challenge harmful gender norms, stigma, and interference from extended family in marriages. Also, community leaders should promote the values of mutual respect, trust, and communication between couples. Similarly, policies that protect individuals from cultural practices that threaten marriage stability, such as forced polygamy and gender bias, must be enforced. Finally, encouraging intergenerational dialogue about evolving marital expectations could help reduce misunderstandings rooted in traditional norms.

6. CONSENT AND ETHICAL APPROVAL

All ethical issues were adhered research permissions were sought, a warrant from the authorities, that is, the University of Iringa, Mtwara Region (RAS) Administrative Secretary, and Mtwara District Administrative Secretary (DAS). In that light, the researcher also observed participants' rights, consent, norms, and cultural ethics. The information provided was protected from anyone and was used for research purposes only. To ensure confidentiality of the respondent's information, all data collected were stored carefully to protect it from unauthorized persons. Information was carefully recorded, and the names of the participants were not recorded.

7. COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that no competing interests exist.

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