

Strengthening the Institution of Marriage: A Systematic Literature Review to Address Divorce among Young Muslim Couples

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ABSTRACT:

Divorce has become an increasingly prominent issue within Muslim societies and Muslim minority contexts, reflecting broader changes in family structures, gender relations, and legal governance. While Islam permits divorce as a last resort, contemporary scholarship suggests that marital dissolution is shaped by complex interactions between religious norms, state legal systems, and socio-cultural realities. Unlike previous reviews that primarily emphasize Islamic legal doctrines or country-specific evidence, this review provides an updated multidisciplinary synthesis integrating Islamic jurisprudence, psychosocial evidence, family systems perspectives, and policy implications. It also identifies methodological trends, knowledge gaps, and future research priorities that may guide scholars, policymakers, and practitioners in strengthening Muslim family institutions. This study conducts a systematic literature review (SLR) of 42 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2025 to synthesize recent research on divorce within Islamic contexts. Guided by the PRISMA framework, articles were retrieved from Taylor & Francis and ProQuest databases using predefined keywords related to Islamic divorce. Thematic analysis identified eight dominant themes: Islamic legal frameworks and divorce governance; gendered experiences and post-divorce vulnerability; early marriage as a precursor to divorce; psychological and mental health implications; intergenerational and family system effects; changing marriage norms; methodological trends; and implications for Islamic family policy. The findings reveal persistent gender inequalities, significant psychosocial and intergenerational consequences of divorce, and growing tensions between traditional Islamic family ideals and contemporary social transformations. Despite the expanding literature, notable gaps remain in integrating Islamic ethical principles with empirical research, addressing preventive strategies, and informing policy and practice. This review

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contributes by offering a comprehensive thematic synthesis and highlighting future research directions to strengthen Islamic family scholarship and support sustainable family well-being..

Keywords: Islamic divorce; Family law; Marriage; Muslim families.

Introduction

Marriage is a fundamental institution in Islam that serves not only as a legal contract but also as a moral, spiritual, and social bond aimed at promoting family stability and human well-being. Islamic teachings emphasize marriage as a relationship grounded in *sakinah* (tranquility), *mawaddah* (affection), and *rahmah* (mercy), while divorce is permitted only as a last resort when reconciliation is no longer possible. Contemporary Islamic family scholarship therefore views divorce not merely as a private marital matter but as a broader issue affecting spouses, children, family systems, and community stability (Hadiyansyah et al., 2025; Dwinandita, 2024; Robaj, 2021).

In recent years, divorce among Muslim couples has become increasingly complex due to the interaction of legal, socio-economic, psychological, and cultural factors. Studies have shown that marital dissolution is often associated with financial pressure, changing gender roles, communication breakdown, domestic conflict, early marriage, and unequal access to legal protection, particularly for women seeking justice within Muslim family law systems (Ramadhita & Syabbul, 2023; Wimpelmann & Saadat, 2025). In Malaysia, official divorce statistics also indicate that Muslim divorce remains a significant family concern, suggesting the need for stronger preventive and support mechanisms within Islamic family institutions (DOSM, 2024; Hassan & Mohamad Farid, 2025).

The issue of divorce is not limited to Muslim-majority countries but is also evident among Muslim minority communities. In European contexts, studies have found that Muslim couples may face difficulties when religious marriages are not formally recognized by civil legal systems, creating challenges in divorce procedures,

women's rights, maintenance, and post-divorce protection (Jaraba, 2020; Sportel, 2020; Vora, 2020). These findings suggest that Islamic divorce must be understood within diverse legal and socio-cultural settings rather than through a single doctrinal or country-specific perspective.

Existing literature has examined divorce from several disciplinary perspectives, including Islamic jurisprudence, socio-legal studies, psychology, gender studies, family studies, and public policy. For example, legal studies highlight the role of judicial discretion and procedural barriers in Muslim divorce cases, while psychosocial studies emphasize the emotional, economic, and mental health consequences of divorce for women, children, and families (Masood et al., 2025; Chen et al., 2025; Counted et al., 2025). However, these studies often remain fragmented, as many focus on specific countries, selected legal issues, or particular groups without integrating broader empirical and Islamic ethical perspectives.

Although previous reviews have contributed to the understanding of Islamic family law and divorce, many have primarily focused on doctrinal legal discussions or country-specific findings. Limited attention has been given to synthesizing recent multidisciplinary evidence on divorce by integrating Islamic jurisprudence, psychosocial well-being, gendered experiences, family system effects, methodological trends, and policy implications. This creates a significant gap in the literature because divorce among young Muslim couples requires a holistic understanding that connects Islamic ethical principles with contemporary empirical realities (Hadiyansyah et al., 2025; Urszula et al., 2025; Masood et al., 2025).

Therefore, this study conducts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) guided by the PRISMA

2020 framework to synthesize peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2025 on divorce within Islamic contexts. Unlike previous reviews that mainly emphasise Islamic legal doctrines or country-specific evidence, this review provides an updated multidisciplinary synthesis integrating Islamic jurisprudence, psychosocial evidence, family systems perspectives, and policy implications. It also identifies methodological trends, knowledge gaps, and future research priorities that may guide scholars, policymakers, counsellors, and Islamic family institutions in strengthening Muslim family well-being and preventing divorce among young couples (Page et al., 2021; Ramadhita & Syabbul, 2023; Dwinandita, 2024).

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze recent scholarly literature on divorce within Islamic contexts by examining publication trends, research methodologies, dominant themes, knowledge gaps, and future research directions. Through this synthesis, the review contributes theoretically by linking Islamic ethical principles with empirical family research, methodologically by organizing recent evidence through a systematic review approach, and practically by informing future interventions, counselling practices, premarital education, and Islamic family policy development (Hadiyansyah et al., 2025; Dwinandita, 2024; Hassan & Mohamad Farid, 2025).

Methodology

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) design guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses). PRISMA is often utilized within the environmental management field. According to Sierra-Correa and Cantera Kintz (2015), it offers three unique advantages which are 1) defining clear research questions that permits systematic research, 2) it identifies inclusion and exclusion criteria and 3) it attempts to examine large database of scientific literature in a defined time. The framework is used to synthesize recent scholarly work on divorce within Islamic contexts. Two academic databases, Taylor & Francis and ProQuest were selected due to their extensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals in Islamic studies, sociology, law, family studies, and social sciences. While databases such as Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) are widely used for bibliometric and citation-focused analyses, preliminary scoping indicated that articles addressing Islamic family issues, particularly divorce, remain relatively limited and unevenly indexed in these databases, especially for socio-legal and qualitative research. Consequently, Taylor & Francis and ProQuest were deemed more suitable for capturing the depth and diversity of scholarship relevant to this review.

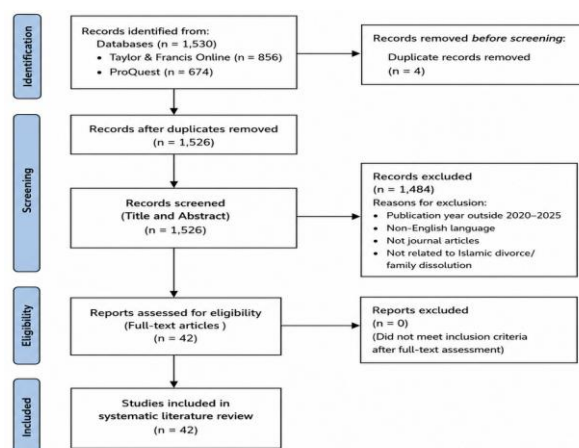


Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection Process (Source: Author's compilation)

The search strategy employed Boolean operators by combining the keywords ("divorce" OR "marital dissolution" OR "talaq" OR "khul")

AND (Islam OR Muslim), with searches performed within the title, abstract, and keyword fields of each database. To ensure the relevance

and quality of the retrieved studies, database filters were applied to include only peer-reviewed journal articles published in the English language between 2020 and 2025. Following the initial search, duplicate records were removed, after which the remaining articles underwent a two-stage screening process. First, titles and abstracts were screened against the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to assess their relevance to divorce within Islamic contexts. Subsequently, full-text articles were evaluated to determine their eligibility, with only studies directly addressing Islamic divorce or family dissolution retained for

the final thematic synthesis in accordance with the PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021).

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the 42 studies included in this systematic literature review. Overall, the reviewed studies demonstrate increasing scholarly attention towards divorce within Islamic contexts between 2020 and 2025 while reflecting considerable diversity in top five of geographical coverage, methodological approaches, participants and research focus.

Table 1: Characteristics of the studies included in this systematic literature review

Year	Frequency	Methodology Used	Frequency
2020	5	Qualitative	23
2021	4	Quantitative	9
2022	6	Mixed Method	5
2023	9	Socio-Legal Analysis	4
2024	7	Conceptual/Theoretical/Review	2
2025	11		
Country	Frequency	Participants	Frequency
Indonesia	10	Women	15
Malaysia	6	Couples	10
Pakistan	4	Judges	4
UK	3	Children	3
Germany	2	Court Documents	10
		Focus	Frequency
		Islamic Family Law	10
		Women	8
		Mental Health	6
		Child Marriage	5
		Family Policy	4

In terms of publication year, scholarly output generally increased throughout the review period. Five studies were published in 2020, followed by four in 2021, six in 2022, nine in 2023, seven in 2024, and eleven in 2025. The increasing number of publications after 2022 suggests growing academic interest in post-pandemic family

dynamics, changing gender roles, and marital instability within Muslim societies (Hassan & Mohamad Farid, 2025; Hadiyansyah et al., 2025).

The reviewed studies covered a wide range of geographical contexts, with Indonesia contributing the largest number of publications, followed by Malaysia and several Middle Eastern

countries. Studies from Muslim-minority settings, including Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, were comparatively fewer. This distribution indicates that contemporary scholarship continues to be dominated by Muslim-majority countries, highlighting the need for greater comparative research involving diverse legal and socio-cultural contexts.

Methodologically, qualitative research constituted the dominant approach, followed by quantitative, socio-legal, mixed-methods, and conceptual studies. This pattern reflects researchers' emphasis on understanding legal interpretation, lived experiences, and the socio-cultural dimensions of divorce. The participants and data sources also varied considerably, including divorced women, married couples, adolescents, judges, religious authorities, court records, and legal documents, illustrating the multidisciplinary nature of contemporary Islamic divorce research.

With respect to research focus, most studies concentrated on Islamic family law, divorce governance, and women's post-divorce experiences, whereas relatively fewer investigations examined preventive interventions, premarital education, family resilience, counselling effectiveness, or policy evaluation. This finding suggests that existing scholarship remains largely reactive by documenting the consequences of divorce rather than proactively identifying evidence-based strategies for strengthening marriage institutions. The following section presents the thematic synthesis of the eight major themes identified across the reviewed studies.

The following discussion presents eight key themes extracted from 42 reviewed studies, highlighting the complexity and multifaceted nature of Islamic divorce.

Islamic Legal Frameworks and Divorce Governance

The reviewed studies show that divorce in Islamic contexts is influenced by both Islamic law and national legal systems. Rather than operating under a single legal framework, divorce practices differ according to each country's legal structure,

cultural norms, and administrative procedures. In Muslim-minority countries, the limited legal recognition of Islamic marriages often forces individuals, particularly women, to seek divorce through informal religious authorities or community mediation, resulting in unequal legal protection and post-divorce challenges (Jaraba, 2020; Vora, 2020).

In Muslim-majority countries, Islamic family law is generally incorporated into the national legal system. However, studies indicate that lengthy court procedures, evidentiary requirements, and judicial discretion can make divorce more difficult, especially for women seeking *khul'* or judicial dissolution (Sportel, 2020; Wimpelmann & Saadat, 2025). These findings suggest that the effectiveness of divorce governance depends not only on Islamic legal principles but also on the efficiency and accessibility of legal institutions.

Overall, the literature indicates that divorce should be understood as both a legal and social process. Future improvements should therefore focus on strengthening legal procedures while ensuring justice, accessibility, and family well-being in accordance with Islamic principles (Urszula et al., 2025).

Gendered Experiences and Post-Divorce Vulnerability

The reviewed studies consistently show that women experience greater economic, social, and emotional challenges following divorce than men. Financial hardship, housing instability, and social stigma were commonly reported, particularly where women's economic opportunities and legal rights remain limited (Masood et al., 2025; Chen et al., 2025).

Beyond financial difficulties, many divorced women also experience psychological distress, including stress, anxiety, and reduced well-being. However, several studies found that religious beliefs and spiritual practices such as prayer and reliance on Allah serve as important coping mechanisms during the post-divorce period (Masood et al., 2025).

These findings suggest that post-divorce support should extend beyond legal assistance to include

economic empowerment, psychological counselling, and faith-based support programmes that promote dignity, justice, and resilience among divorced women.

Early Marriage as a Structural Precursor to Divorce

Many studies identified early marriage as one of the major factors contributing to divorce. Marriages entered at a young age are often associated with limited emotional maturity, financial instability, and unequal power relationships, increasing the likelihood of marital conflict and separation (Ahmed et al., 2025; Ali et al., 2025).

The literature further shows that early marriage disproportionately affects girls by limiting their education, employment opportunities, and decision-making capacity within marriage (Ak et al., 2025). These disadvantages reduce their ability to cope with marital challenges and increase their vulnerability to divorce.

From an Islamic perspective, scholars argue that successful marriage should be based on maturity, mutual respect, and preparedness. Strengthening premarital education and delaying marriage until couples are adequately prepared may therefore contribute to more sustainable Muslim families (Hadiyansyah et al., 2025).

Psychological and Mental Health Implications of Divorce

The reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that divorce has significant psychological consequences for both adults and children. Depression, anxiety, reduced life satisfaction, and emotional distress were frequently reported among divorced individuals (Chen et al., 2025; Counted et al., 2025).

Children and adolescents from divorced families were also found to be more vulnerable to emotional and behavioural problems, indicating that the effects of divorce extend beyond the couple to the wider family (Sahril et al., 2025).

Although religious beliefs provide emotional support for many individuals, the literature suggests that mental health services remain

insufficiently integrated into Islamic family counselling and divorce interventions. Greater collaboration between religious institutions and mental health professionals is therefore needed.

Intergenerational and Family System Effects

The reviewed literature indicates that divorce has long-term effects on family relationships and children's development. Several studies found that parental divorce may negatively influence children's education, emotional well-being, and behavioural adjustment (Trevor & Nwanamidwa, 2025).

Research also suggests that the impact of divorce can continue into adulthood, affecting individuals' trust, social relationships, and overall well-being (Counted et al., 2025). These findings support the importance of maintaining healthy family relationships even after marital dissolution. Overall, the literature highlights the need for child-centred divorce policies that prioritise children's welfare while supporting cooperative parenting and family stability.

Changing Marriage Norms and Social Transformations

The reviewed studies suggest that changing social values have influenced marriage and divorce among Muslim communities. Delayed marriage, changing gender roles, and increasing individual autonomy have altered couples' expectations and contributed to new marital challenges (Ayeibeng et al., 2025).

Interfaith and cross-cultural marriages were also identified as factors that may complicate divorce because of differences in legal systems, cultural expectations, and religious practices (Sai, 2025).

Rather than viewing these changes as negative, the literature recommends that Islamic family institutions adapt to contemporary realities while preserving the core Islamic values of justice, compassion, and family harmony (Madondo et al., 2025).

Methodological Trends and Knowledge Gaps

The reviewed studies employed diverse methodologies, including qualitative,

quantitative, mixed-methods, and legal analyses. However, qualitative studies were the most common, reflecting researchers' interest in understanding lived experiences and legal practices (Urszula et al., 2025).

Despite this diversity, important gaps remain. Most studies examined the consequences of divorce rather than preventive measures, and relatively few adopted longitudinal or interdisciplinary approaches. Future research should integrate Islamic legal scholarship with empirical social science to produce stronger evidence that supports effective family policies and interventions.

Implications for Islamic Family Policy and Practice

Overall, the reviewed studies demonstrate that divorce is influenced by legal, social, psychological, and economic factors rather than by religious issues alone. This highlights the need for a more holistic approach to Islamic family governance that combines legal protection, psychological support, and preventive family programmes (Hadiyansyah et al., 2025).

The literature consistently recommends strengthening premarital education, improving access to counselling services, promoting gender-sensitive legal reforms, and expanding post-divorce support systems (Masood et al., 2025). Such initiatives are consistent with the Islamic objectives of preserving justice, dignity, and family well-being.

Collectively, the findings suggest that future Islamic family policies should focus not only on managing divorce but also on strengthening marriages through preventive, evidence-based, and value-oriented interventions.

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Conclusion

This systematic literature review synthesized 42 peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2025 to examine divorce within Islamic contexts from legal, social, psychological, and policy perspectives. The findings demonstrate that divorce is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the interaction of Islamic legal governance, gender dynamics, early marriage, mental health, family systems, and changing social norms. While existing studies have substantially advanced understanding of the causes and consequences of divorce, the review also identified important methodological and geographical gaps, particularly the limited integration of Islamic ethical principles with empirical family research and the scarcity of longitudinal and comparative studies. The review contributes to the literature by providing an updated thematic synthesis that consolidates fragmented evidence into a comprehensive understanding of contemporary Islamic divorce. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of strengthening premarital education, family counselling, gender-sensitive legal reforms, and faith-based psychosocial support to promote family well-being in line with the objectives. Future research should adopt interdisciplinary and evidence-based approaches that integrate Islamic jurisprudence with social science perspectives to support more effective policies and sustainable interventions for strengthening Muslim family institutions.

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