



# Divorce and Post-divorce Adjustment: Definitions, Models and Assessment of Adjustment

## *Boşanma ve Boşanma Sonrası Uyum: Tanımlar, Modeller ve Uyumun Değerlendirilmesi*

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### ABSTRACT

Divorce is a stressful life transformation process that includes the post-divorce stage as well as the stages of decision making and divorce proceedings. This process affects almost all areas of life and causes many changes in living conditions. On the one hand, the divorced individual confronts the reality of the divorce and realizes the intense emotions and changes to deal with. On the other hand, the individual focuses on his/her transition to a new identity and lifestyle. Current statistics reveal the increase in divorce rates both in the world and in our country. Therefore, it seems important to consider the divorce process in terms of adjustment. There are many approaches to examine divorce and post-divorce adjustment process. Although these models differ in explaining post-divorce adjustment, all of them consider adjustment as a part of the divorce process. Thus, this review study has several purposes. First of all, current divorce rates and effects of divorce in legal, economic, social terms and in terms of psychological and physiological health will be included. Then, divorce and post-divorce adjustment models and assessment of adjustment will be explained. It is believed that a comprehensive review of divorce and post-divorce adjustment would facilitate divorced individuals to access appropriate information and support. Besides, correct understanding of the process regarding divorce and divorce-adjustment will be useful for further studies.

**Keywords:** Divorce, emotional adjustment, social problems

### ÖZ

Boşanma, kararın alınması ve boşanma işlemlerinin sürdüğü dönemlerin yanı sıra boşanma sonrası dönemi de kapsayan stresli bir yaşam dönüştürme sürecidir. Bu süreç, yaşamın neredeyse tüm alanlarını etkilemekte ve hayat koşullarında birçok değişimi beraberinde getirmektedir. Boşanan birey, bir yandan boşanmanın gerçekliğiyle yüzleşir ve ortaya çıkan duygular ve baş edilecek değişimler olduğunu fark eder. Diğer yandan, yeni kimliğine ve yaşam tarzına doğru geçişe odaklanır. Güncel istatistikler hem dünyada hem de ülkemizde boşanma oranlarındaki artışı gözler önüne sermektedir. Dolayısıyla boşanma sürecinin uyum açısından ele alınması önemli görünmektedir. Boşanma ve boşanma sonrası uyum sürecini anlamak amacıyla ileri sürülen pek çok yaklaşım bulunmaktadır. Bu yaklaşımlar, boşanma sonrası uyumu açıklama konusunda farklılaşsa da uyumu boşanma sürecinden ayırmamaktadır. Buradan hareketle, bu gözden geçirme çalışmasının çeşitli amaçları bulunmaktadır. İlk olarak güncel boşanma oranları ve boşanmanın hukuki, ekonomik, sosyal, toplumsal, psikolojik ve fizyolojik sağlık açısından sonuçlarına yer verilecektir. Ardından, boşanma ve boşanma sonrası uyumu açıklayan yaklaşımlar ve uyumun değerlendirilmesi açıklanacaktır. Boşanma ve boşanma sonrası uyumun kapsamlı bir şekilde ele alınmasının boşanan bireyin uygun bilgi ve desteğe erişimini kolaylaştıracağı düşünülmektedir. Ayrıca boşanma ve boşanmaya uyum ile ilgili sürecin doğru anlaşılması araştırmalar açısından da faydalı olacaktır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Boşanma, duygusal uyum, sosyal sorunlar

## Introduction

Marriage is a type of a close relationship that progresses within the framework of mutual needs and roles and is established with positive expectations. However, rapid social, economic and cultural changes occurring in the globalized world have created a dynamo effect, affecting marriage and family relations and causing some changes (Şener and Terzioğlu 2008). One of the most interesting part of such

changes is divorce rates. Divorce is the legal termination of marital union due to various reasons. Each divorce is a multidimensional experience with its own unique aspects and has effects on both individual and social basis (Canbulat 2017). Changes in the family structure have caused divorce to become a more frequent way to end an unsatisfactory relationship.

The descriptions of divorce as “a traumatic life crisis” and “a stressful process” in the relevant literature underline the

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importance to be attached to the subject matter in psychological terms (Herman 1974, Smith Barnet 1990, Pledge 1992). Divorce is not a single event; on the contrary, it is a psychological life transformation and a life crisis that extends over time as pre-divorce process where couples get to the stage of divorce and they decide to get divorced, the legal process where divorce proceedings are initiated and carried out, and the post-divorce process starting after the legal finalization of divorce (Smith Barnet 1990, Kitson and Holmes 1992, Pledge 1992).

Divorce causes many changes that lead to a need for adaptation in almost all areas of an individual's life, including legal, economic, social, societal, psychological and physiological (Herman 1974, Amato 2000). Besides such simultaneous changes, the stigmatizing viewpoint of society toward divorce and divorced people puts the divorce process at a different point from other stressful life events (Pledge 1992, Bevvino and Sharkin 2003). At this point, it is necessary to address the concept of post-divorce adjustment. How post-divorce adjustment is defined, what factors it is affected by and how it will be measured seem important in both theoretical and practical terms.

Numerous approaches have been put forward in order to explain divorce and post-divorce adjustment process. While some of them are stage-oriented (Bohannon 1970, Kessler 1975, Wiseman 1975, Froiland and Hozman 1977, Levy and Joffe 1978, Ahrons 1980, Kressel 1980, Hackney and Bernard 1990), others take a stress model (Hill 1958, McCubbin and Patterson 1983, Patterson 1988) and *family resilience* (Patterson 2002, Walsh 2016) as a basis. In assessing adjustment, whereas some studies are conducted focusing on psychological symptoms and problems (Berman 1988, Doherty et al. 1989, Lorenz et al. 1997, Kramrei et al. 2007, Bowen and Jensen 2017), other studies employ measurement tools specifically aimed at post-divorce adjustment (Fisher 1976, 1978, Sweeper and Halford 2006).

Based thereupon, the present study aims to bring a clinical psychology-based perspective to the phenomenon of divorce, taking into account the increasing divorce rates and multidimensional effects caused by divorce. For this purpose, first of all, current statistics on divorce will be included, and the experience of divorce will be discussed in terms of its legal, economic, social, societal, psychological and physiological effects. Then, how post-divorce adjustment is defined and what factors it is affected by will be examined; approaches explaining post-divorce adjustments will be discussed. Finally, different perspectives on the assessment of adjustment will be reviewed. Thus, divorce process, accompanied by intense emotions and deemed a psychologically challenging life experience, will be comprehensively addressed. In this context, it is believed that the present study will fill the gap in the literature since it guides the development of intervention programs compatible to the nature of the process, which the divorced person is undergoing, and since it provides insights into correct assessment of the difficulties caused by divorce.

## Current Data on Divorce

Changes in marriage and divorce rates in the current century have led to significant differences in the family system. Current statistics quite clearly reveal the increase in the inclination for divorce both in the world and in our country. The data from the Organization for Economic Development and Co-operation (OECD) reveal that crude divorce rates, which mean the number of divorces per 1000 people in a certain year, have steadily increased in global terms in the last fifty years (OECD 2019).

Although there is an increase in divorce rates among adults aged 50 and older in the United States, it is noteworthy that divorce rates have decreased especially compared to the last 10 years. However, it is thought that this might be related to the reduction in marriage rates as cohabitation has become more preferable (Raley and Sweeney 2020). Although the divorce rates in our country are lower compared to Scandinavian countries such as Denmark, Finland, Sweden, it is seen that these rates parallel those of other western countries such as Austria, the Netherlands, Hungary, Switzerland and Slovakia (United Nations 2020). The data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT) for the year 2019 show that crude divorce rate in Turkey has increased by almost three times compared to the last twenty years (TURKSTAT 1999, 2019). Examining the statistics for the year 2020 on divorce shows that crude divorce rate is 1.62‰ and that it has decreased compared to the previous year. It is thought that this situation might be related to both the 10.1% decrease in marriage rates in the last year and the fact that pandemic conditions have disrupted divorce process. However, upon an examination of the divorce rates according to months, it is stated that there was a significant decrease in April and May 2020 (TURKSTAT 2020).

Current rates indicate that the lowest crude divorce rate is in Hakkari (0.24‰), the highest is in Antalya (2.47‰). It is seen that 35.3% of divorces occur during the first five years of marriage, followed by divorce of 6 to 10 years of marriages with the rate of 20.7%. Besides, it is seen that the custody of the children of divorced couples is granted to the mother with the rate of 75.8% (TURKSTAT 2020).

## Effects of Divorce

### Legal Effects of Divorce

In order to correctly construe the legal repercussions of divorce, a part of the judicial system (Şen 2013), on an individual, it is important to explain the legal course of divorce in our country. In our country, where “divorce system based on certain grounds for divorce and judicial decision” is employed, one of the accepted ways to terminate a marital union is divorce. Legally-recognized grounds for divorce are classified into two groups as general and specific, and giving at least one of the grounds in these groups might initiate the legal divorce process (Şanlı Yalın 2017, Bozdağ 2019). Another issue affecting the course of the legal process is whether divorce is uncontested or contested. For an uncontested divorce, the marital union has to last for a minimum of one year,

and the parties have to agree upon divorce and material issues related to divorce (Özcan Çelik 2015). For couples who cannot fulfill such conditions, the divorce process is contested (Şanlı Yalın 2017).

With the finalization of divorce decision, a number of personal and financial binding consequences for the divorced person arise, such as custody, alimony, compensation, division of property. Custody means that divorced parents have all responsibilities and powers related to their children until their children reach lawful age of maturity. Although it is usually granted to one of the spouses, custody might be joint as well (Kiremitçi 2014). Alimony has three forms: child alimony, spousal alimony and support alimony. In case the divorced couple has a mutual child, the basic needs of the child such as care, protection and education are met by child alimony regardless of who has the right of custody (Memişoğlu Bozan 2019), and support alimony is paid for children that have reached lawful age of maturity but still continue their education (Sonat 2013). Spousal alimony is a type of alimony that can be paid to one of the divorcing parties, if such party will fall into “poverty” due to divorce and provided that the requesting spouse will not be at more fault than the other (Demirbaş 2018).

Divorced couples might have disagreements regarding both custody and alimony, which might be challenging for them. Differences are observed in the relationship between parent and child after divorce, and the divorced couple needs to adapt to the changing conditions and relations as parents. The responsibility of the parent, who has the right of custody increases, and significant changes occur in the relation between the child and the other parent (Öngider 2013). *Parental Alienation Syndrom*, which means that one parent tries to consciously shape the perception of their child/children toward the other parent negatively, is one of the problematic areas regarding custody and is emotionally quite exhausting both for the child and the alienated parent (Güler 2017). Since fault criterion is sought, and there is no time criterion, another compelling legal subject matter for those getting a divorce is spousal alimony. The fault criterion causes the responsible party that pays alimony to follow up his/her ex-spouse to find fault, which leads to an ongoing conflict between the ex-spouses. Since spousal alimony is indefinite, it might be compelling for both the party that receives alimony and the party that pays alimony for reasons such as the failure to cut off the communication and bond between ex-spouses, the unrest caused by indefinite economic obligation of the party paying the alimony, failure of the party receiving alimony to participate in production power or such party working with no insurance (Demirbaş 2018).

### **Economic, Social and Societal Effects of Divorce**

Divorce, which leads to a number of changes in the standard of living, might disrupt the adjustment for the divorced person in economic, social and societal terms. The divorced individual not only tries to cope with the economic problems caused by the divorce process, but s/he also experiences the change occurring in the interaction of society, his/her kith and kin with him/her.

It is stated that such difficulties can be even more severe when it comes to children (Amato and Keith 1991).

Decrease in economic resources due to divorce, difficulty in finding housing and expenses might disrupt the adjustment of the person (Asanjarani et al. 2017), which is becoming more and more challenging especially for those without any financial security. It is known that having a steady income affects the divorce process at the decision-making stage (Can and Aksu 2016). Women, who do not participate in working life for various reasons and live on the income that their spouses provide during the marriage, turn towards working life after divorce. However, it is not easy due to reasons such as lack of experience and advanced age. Besides, having problems with their ex-spouse regarding the alimony also leads to an increase in women’s economic difficulties (Arıkan 1996). As for men, it is stated that it might be challenging if the amount of alimony and the method of alimony payment exceeds their economic status. The irregularity that the parent, who has the right of custody, might experience in alimony payments might increase the level of victimization. The fact that the parent, who has the right of custody, has to work to make a living so that the time allocated to the child is not enough might pave the way for consequences such as children being deprived of courses, hobbies etc. in direct proportion to income (Amato and Keith 1991).

Termination of a marital relationship might also lead to a narrowing in social network and interaction. Relationships with mutual friends and bonds with family of the ex-spouse decline due to uncertainty caused by divorce (Kramrei et al. 2007). Furthermore, despite the significant increase in divorce rates, prejudices against divorce and divorced individuals remain, especially in traditional societies. These prejudices increase the pressure on the divorced individuals, making the process even more difficult (Herman 1974, Arıkan 1996). Thus, the social life of a divorced person might be seriously affected due to the reactions of his/her environment towards his/her divorce and anxiety of rejection (Thomas and Ryan 2008). Can and Aksu (2016), discussing the divorce and post-divorce process from the perspective of women, determined that women were mostly concerned about society’s point of view, social pressure, the necessity to explain the ground for divorce, the possibility to be disturbed by the opposite sex, having to go to their family’s home and losing the feeling of trust in their relationships, in addition to accommodation and the future of their children. Likewise, the experience of divorce might negatively affect a person’s view on a new relationship, causing them to have difficulty feeling trust and intimacy (Karadeniz Özbek 2019).

Since custody is generally granted to the mother after divorce, men are kept away from their children, and since people consider men at fault and the responsible party to the divorce, men struggle with prejudices of the society (Arıkan 1996). The fact that divorce is labelled as “failure” for both men and women by the society affects the establishment of new relationships, leading to stigmatization of divorced people. In fact, some divorced people express that they are

trying not to reveal that they are divorced (Herman 1974, Arıkan 1996).

### **Psychological and Physiological Effects of Divorce**

When the relevant literature is examined, it is noteworthy that divorce is defined as “trauma” (Herman, 1974), “grieving” (Yárnöz-Yaben 2017), “life crisis” (Wiseman 1975) “life stressor” (Pledge 1992, Mastekaasa 1997). The reasons why such definitions are needed are the psychological effects of divorce, along with a range of changes that occur due to divorce.

Due to the effects that it creates, divorce is thought to be an experience similar to the loss of a spouse by death (Gove and Shin 1989). Some authors liken divorce to the “death” of marital relationship. In this metaphor, there are those who mourn (divorced couple and children, if any) the loss of the relationship, just as in the death of a relative, and the official bodies needed to carry out the procedures related to the loss (Alpaslan 2018). Holmes and Rahe (1967) put forward that divorce was reported as the most stressful life event after the loss of a spouse through death.

Divorce is an experience with intense emotions regardless of the nature of the marital relationship and its effect on the individual’s decision to divorce (Yárnöz et al. 2008). Emotional complexity of feelings such as pain, fear, jealousy, suspect, mourning (Emery 1994, Canham et al. 2014), sadness, guilt, shame, loneliness and anger (Bloom et al. 1985, Wallerstein 1986, Emery and Wyer 1987) as well as the feeling of failure (Peters and Liefbroer 1997) can be seen after divorce. Along with reduced self-esteem and self-confidence, pessimistic feelings towards the future can also be experienced (Frisby et al. 2012). Besides, the fact that divorced individuals report a lower level of psychological well-being (Gove and Shin 1989, Amato 2000, Forste and Heaton 2004, Afifi et al. 2006), higher level of depression and anxiety (Menaghan and Lieberman 1986, Emery and Wyer 1987, Doherty et al. 1989, Lorenz et al. 1997, Hope et al. 1999, Thuen 2001) and use of alcohol/tobacco (Lillard and Waite 1995) compared to those that are married, and the fact that they are at higher risk for suicide (Trovato 1986) reveal various effects of divorce on psychological health.

A great number of studies have found that divorce has negative effects on physiological health as well. Impairments in general functionality can be seen with the termination of marriage (Frisby et al. 2012) It has been seen that divorced people reported more blood pressure and sleep problems, considered their health to be more negative and had more death rates compared to married or single ones (Zick and Smith 1991, Lillard and Waite 1995, Hemström 1996, Rogers 1996, Joung et al. 1997, Murphy et al. 1997, Sbarra et al. 2011).

### **Post-divorce Adjustment and Factors Affecting the Adjustment**

Various effects of divorce and a great number of changes that occur in an individual’s life after divorce draw attention to the

importance of the concept of post-divorce adjustment. In this context, it is seen that some researchers define the adjustment focusing on psychological symptoms such as depression and anxiety and various feelings such as loneliness, failure and rejection. However, adaptation to divorce means more than the absence of such negative symptoms (Kramrei et al. 2007). Because divorce involves a variety of specific stress factors both in terms of the relationship with the ex-spouse and in economic and social terms (Sweeper and Halford 2006).

Post-divorce adjustment is a fluctuating process, during which a new order is established by getting rid of the complexity caused by the crisis (Hill 1958). It indicates the ability to fulfill the needs of daily life and the reorganizing of the self by separating from the ex-spouse (Kitson and Morgan 1990, Diedrick 1991). Bevvino and Sharkin (2003) conceptualize post-divorce adjustment as finding meaning to the experience of divorce. In this context, adjustment corresponds to a process, during which psychological and emotional fluctuations start to end while adapting to a series of changes created by divorce (Kramrei et al. 2007). During the adjustment process, an individual tries to organize what is necessary in his/her new life without his/her ex-spouse while struggling with the psychological effects caused by divorce (Kitson and Raschke 1981, Sakraida 2008). Adjustment to divorce is also a process of creating new definitions as family relationships are redefined. Reorganization the self and family both as intrafamilial and extrafamilial relationships is necessary in the process of adjustment to divorce (Pais and White 1979). The fact that the divorced individual uses the resources s/he has during this process, during which s/he develops different perspectives on marriage, divorce and the self, is part of adjustment to divorce (Pietsch 2002). In other words, post-divorce adjustment process, during which identity and role changes are regulated, family and parenting are organized based on the new reality, the relationship with the ex-spouse changes, and a new lifestyle is established in economic and social terms, is a process of emotional and cognitive restructuring (Boon 2005).

Some sociodemographic variables such as gender, age, educational level, relationship status and some characteristics related to the terminated marriage and divorce might affect post-divorce adjustment in different ways. There are different findings regarding gender and age. While some studies show that men (Diedrick 1991, Amato 2000) demonstrate lower level of post-adjustment, others show that women (Thuen 2001) demonstrate lower level of adjustment; however, some studies reveal that there is no significant difference between men and women in terms of level of post-divorce adjustment (Colburn et al. 1992, Hensley 1996, Vukalovich and Caltabiano 2008). Although most studies show that the level of post-divorce adjustment decreases as age advances (Uhlenberg and Myers 1981, Chiriboga 1982, Wallerstein 1986, Tschann et al. 1989, Cooney and Uhlenberg 1990, Veevers 1991), a limited number of studies indicate that divorce disrupts the adjustment of younger people more (Gove and Shin 1989). Having a new relationship after divorce, regardless of higher level of education and the nature of the

relationship, seems to increase post-divorce adjustment (Veevers 1991, Symoens et al. 2014)

Factors related to divorce and marriage such as the time passed after divorce, the perceived effect on the decision to divorce, quality of the terminated marital relationship, whether the couple has children or not, evaluations related to marriage and divorce are some characteristics associated with post-divorce adjustment. That more time has passed after divorce, being more decisive in the decision to divorce and evaluating the terminated marriage as more problematic seem to be positively associated with adjustment (Veevers 1991, Bevino and Sharkin 2003, Kalmijn and Monden 2006, Amato et al. 2007). Although there are no consistent findings, the fact that a divorced couple has a child together seems to increase the uncertainty of boundaries between ex-spouses and to make adjustment more difficult due to responsibilities related to child care (Veevers 1991, Madden-Derich et al. 1999, Thuen 2001). An individual's irrational beliefs and attitudes towards marriage and divorce have also a direct impact on post-divorce adjustment (Wang and Amato 2000, Munoz-Eguileta 2007, Sayan Karahan 2021). Accordingly, people with stricter attitudes seem to have experienced more psychological distress (Booth and Amato 1991, Veevers 1991).

As with most stressful life events, psychological factors seem to have an impact on post-divorce adjustment. Social support (Kołodziej-Zaleska and Przybyła-Basista 2016, Kramrei et al. 2007), the capacity of an individual to forgive him/herself and his/her ex-spouse, his/her level of anger (Rohde-Brown and Rudestam 2011), perceived stress and coping style (Sakraida 2008, Kulik and Heine-Cohen 2011), locus of control and sense of coherence (Cohen and Dekel 2000, Kulik and Heine-Cohen 2011) are indicated to be associated with post-divorce adjustment. Feeling of guilt regarding divorce might adversely affect post-divorce adjustment causing difficulties both in separating from the ex-spouse and reshaping close relationships (Pais and White 1979) and in establishing a new emotional relationship and maternal functionalities (Baum 2007). Professional support, received after divorce, affects the level of adjustment by enabling the re-evaluation of negative feelings and thoughts about the self (Asanjarani et al. 2017).

### **Approaches Elucidating Post-divorce Adjustment**

Divorce is a long process that covers the legal proceedings and post-divorce period, starting from the stage of decision in general terms. Based on the view indicating that divorce extends over a long-term process rather than being a single event, various stage-oriented approaches have been put forward in order to understand this process.

According to Bohannan (1970), divorce occurs in six stages, the order and intensity of which can vary, as "emotional", "legal", "economic", "co-parental" "community" and "psychic". The first stage might last for many years when the couple ignores that there is a problem in their marriage and the marriage might continue or

end based on their approaches in the ongoing process. In the legal stage of divorce, both intense emotions and confusion caused by legal issues might be experienced. Issues such as alimony and custody are discussed in the economic and co-parental stages of divorce. In the community stage, progressing with the effort of the divorced individual to create a new social network, the awareness that life has taken a different path than expected and re-building of identity are observed. In the last stage, it is seen that the priorities and values in life are reviewed, and self-management skills develop (as cited in Salts 1979). In this model, the adjustment process begins from the second stage, legal divorce (Hackney and Bernard 1990).

Pais and White (1979) considered post-divorce adjustment the process of "family redefinition." This process is composed of *emotional redefinition*, *co-parental redefinition*, *legal*, *economic*, *community* and *psychic redefinition* based on the six stages that Bohannan (1970) put forward. *Emotional redefinition* is the process of mourning the loss after realizing that the state of being "chosen" by someone as in the nature of marriage is now reversed. *Co-parental redefinition* is a process during which duties and responsibilities related to children are reorganized whereas all legal procedures related to divorce are carried out during the process of *legal redefinition*. *The process of economic redefinition* begins when spouses economically separate and become independent. *The community redefinition* is a process during which the couple terminating their marriage build their individual identities and benefit from social networks at this stage. *Psychic redefinition* refers to a process during which the divorced individual copes with the negative feelings that emerge at the beginning of the process by creating his/her own identity.

Kessler (1975) offers a seven-stage perspective, which starts with the *disillusionment* stage, accompanied by negative thoughts about relationship, and the *erosion* stage, during which relationship satisfaction and contact significantly reduce, which continues with the *detachment*, *physical separation*, *mourning*, *second adolescence* and *hard work* stages. Couples who cannot return from the erosion stage progress through subsequent processes and go through stages during which they rediscover themselves and reorganize their identities after the multidimensional loss caused by separation (as cited in Salts 1979).

Wiseman (1975), who considered divorce an emotional life crisis, tried to elucidate post-divorce adjustment with reference to the five stages of grief model (see Kübler-Ross 1969). During this process, divorced individuals undergo five overlapping stages: *denial*, *loss and depression*, *anger and ambivalence*, *reorientation of lifestyle and identity* and *acceptance*. Accordingly, a process is experienced that starts from the decision to divorce and involves the reorganization of social and societal areas of the divorced couple and their relationship with each other and, if they have any, with their children. The loss stage, triggered by the realization that the stress accumulated in the relationship has reached a non-negligible level and that problems can no longer be dealt with and by bringing divorce into question, follows the denial stage, during which the problems in the marriage of couple

are ignored. In this stage, many emotions can be intensively experienced. During the process of reorientation of lifestyle and identity, the divorced individual starts to focus on future plans and directs his/her attention to separating own identity from ex-spouse and marriage. Going through these stages, an individual starts to feel adequate in many areas of life and reorganizes both the circumstances that change with divorce and the close relationships.

Similar to Wiseman (1975), Froiland and Hozman (1977) utilized five stages of grief model (see Kübler-Ross 1969) in explaining the divorce process. Accordingly, divorce process is composed of the *denial* stage, during which the arising problems in marriage are ignored; the *anger* stage, during which disillusionment is experienced and spouses look for alliance from their kith and kin; the *bargaining* stage, during which negotiation process between spouses starts, and an agreement regarding mutual terms is tried to be reached; the *depression* stage, which arises from the loss of the relationship and during which the self-value is questioned, feelings of sadness and pessimism are experienced; and lastly the *acceptance* stage, during which spouses embrace the loss of marriage.

Levy and Joffe (1977) note that developmental stages are experienced, which they identify as *separation*, *individuation* and *reconnection*, each of which carries specific needs, concerns and opportunities for an individual to develop. Separation is the stage during which an individual experiences many different emotions, and thoughts as to how to cope with the fact that his/her life has turned upside-down emerge. According to Levy and Joffe (1977), only this stage contains all five stages of grief (see Kübler-Ross 1969). People who are at this stage of the divorce process need to understand that the feelings they experience are normal. Moreover, being supported to be prepared for what expects them and to learn to be alone during this process will be supportive for their perception of control. Individuation is a stage during which a new existence replaces the old one; an individual moves into an order with which s/he is not familiar and builds a new identity. Reconnection is a stage during which an individual leaves the past behind after a successful individuation, establishes new close relationships and satisfies own needs with meaningful relationships. Relationships, norms in relationships, and social networks are all new to the individual.

According to Ahrons (1980), divorce is a transition process that causes changes in the family system, and this process starts within the marriage long before legal action for divorce is taken. Based thereupon, five transition processes have been defined, the order of occurrence of which can change: *individual cognition*, *family metacognition*, *systemic separation*, *systemic reorganization*, and *family redefinition*. The first stage indicates a period of denial, in which spouses feel distressed but avoid looking for the origin of the problem in the marital relationship, and they apply various coping strategies such as having children, stopping investment in the relationship. In the second stage, family members start to notice that the origin of the distress is the family system, and contradictory feelings related to the spouse are experienced.

As existing roles begin to disappear, new roles have not yet formed. The third stage corresponds to a process during which environments are separated, boundaries are uncertain, separation is disclosed to the kith and kin, and legal actions are initiated. The most obvious feature of the fourth stage is that the clarity that occurs as boundary uncertainties disappear is stressful. At this stage, arrangements related to the form of the relationship that parents will establish with their child have been made. At the final stage, the new identity of the family is defined, and a new marriage may be in question.

Conceptualizing the divorce process with a coping process during which emotional fluctuations are experienced, Kressel (1980) discussed this process from both an individual and a couple's perspective. From the individual perspective, four stages of coping have been defined: *denial*, during which the possibility of termination of marriage is ignored; *mourning*, which is accompanied by negative feelings and during which social interaction is reduced; *hostility and anger* directed at the ex-spouse and the opposite sex; *readjustment*, which occurs gradually and during which an insight is gained and realistic plans for the future are made. From the couple's perspective, this process is divided into four periods: the *pre-divorce decision*, *decision*, *negotiation* and *re-equilibration period*. The pre-decision period covers a process during which discontent and tension in the marital relationship are noticed, various ways of solving it are sought, and the inability to reach a solution causes a breaking point; thus, the couple applies to legal counseling. This process can take several weeks as well as several years. The second period can be summed by emotional and cognitive fluctuations. It is a process during which at least one of the spouses decides to divorce, but the initial relief of the decision is replaced by anxiety and fear, and rapprochement can be seen. However, increasing discussions and tension reveal themselves again. Intense emotions accompany the third period, during which negotiations and conflicts take place to make decisions on legal issues. This period can be more challenging if there is an emotional ambivalence about divorce and financial difficulties during marriage. The last period refers to a period during which the fluctuating process stabilizes, and the evaluations regarding the terminated relationship and the ex-spouse become more objective if coping process has progressed successfully.

Hackney and Bernard (1990), emphasizing that approaches elucidating divorce process are insufficient in terms of importance of individual adaptation, developed Dyadic Divorce Adjustment Model consisting of eight stages. This model begins with the first stage, in which either spouse or both of the spouses realize that there is a problem and continues with the reaction of the couple to such problem. The reaction affects whether marriage or divorce counseling will be discussed. The third stage, *escape to fantasy*, is a stage which serves as a defense mechanism and during which compensating behaviors are preferred rather than solving problems, causing the couple to grow apart and leading to *physical separation*. During such ongoing process, the stage of acceptance of the termination of the relationship is experienced; the past is accepted and future plans are made. Legally, divorce is the

stage at which the separation of the couple becomes official, and legal arrangements are made. The *psychic divorce* stage refers to an intrinsic break, and during the *autonomy* stage, life, roles and responsibilities reorganize.

In all these models, it is seen that post-divorce adjustment is discussed within a process approach and not separated from divorce process; although it is expressed using different concepts, it points out to reorganizations that an individual will make in various areas. In addition, there are models discussing post-divorce adjustment within the framework of stress models (Hill 1958, McCubbin and Patterson 1983, Patterson 1988) and family resilience (Patterson 2002, Walsh 2016).

According to ABCX Model of Family Stress and Coping developed by Hill (1958), there are some factors that predispose the family to crisis and interact with each other. The event (A) interacts with (B) the resources available to a family, and such resources affect (C) the family's perceptions of the stressor, thus leading to a crisis (X). According to this model, what makes a family more vulnerable to crisis is the lack of resources corresponding to the stressor and negative judgment of the situation. McCubbin and Patterson (1983) extended this model and suggested the Double ABCX model. This extended model was formed by adding post-crisis factors to the original model. "The aA factor" refers to a series of stressors in addition to the event, "the bB factor" to existing and new resources of the family, "the cC factor" to how the crisis-precipitating event is perceived and defined by the family. "The factor xX" is the outcome of the reaction of the family to crisis and stressors, and it refers to adaptation or maladaptation. Although this Model of Family Stress and Coping is often used to assess the family adaptation in different stressful life events, there are limited number of studies discussing the subject matter of divorce within the framework of this model. These studies evaluate various variables that affect the level of adjustment of divorced individual by basing post-divorce adjustment on the xX factor (Plummer and Koch-Hattem 1986, Tschann et al. 1989, Nikparvar et al. 2021).

According to the Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response (FAAR) Model, (Patterson 1988) adaptation and adjustment that the family will experience after a crisis-event emerge with mutual interaction of *demands*, *capabilities* and *meanings*. Demands consist of stressors, accompanying difficulties and daily struggles; capabilities consist of the resources and behaviors that the family has to cope with. Meanings refer to the demands and capabilities of the family, how the family defines itself as a family, and the family's view of life. If the imbalance that occurs when there are demands exceeding the capabilities of the family cannot be solved in a short period of time, disruptions in the functioning of the family occur. If the family is able to reflect this process on the family's functionality positively, family resilience becomes possible. Patterson (1988) considers divorce a family crisis that breaks the family system and causes destabilization and emphasizes an adjustment stage requiring the old to be destroyed and the new to be established.

*Family resilience* originates from the idea indicating that a family can have resilience as a "unit" just like individual resilience while struggling with adverse life events (Patterson 2002). According to Patterson (2002), who combines the Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response Model with the idea of family resilience, the adaptation of the family that the model positions as a positive outcome corresponds to the family resilience. There has to be a situation that concerns at least two members of the family to consider family resilience. In the FAAR model, the emphasis on the relationship between family members and family, and between family and society is important for family resilience. In other words, family is a tool connecting individual, family and society together, and such connection promotes resilience both by contributing to socialization process of the individual and family and by providing protection in various aspects. Achieving resilience develops in a process in the case of divorce which extends over a long period of time with its before and after and which involves a complex series of changes such as reorganization of life as well as legal issues (Walsh 2016).

Walsh (2016) considers divorce as one of the negative life transitions a family can encounter and discusses adaptation to such life crises in terms of psychological resilience. Based thereupon, she put forward the Family Resilience Theory consisting of three main domains of "*shared belief systems*", "*organizational processes*" and "*communication/problem-solving processes*", each of which has three processes. She defines family resilience as the capacity for adapting which includes change and transformation of the family, beyond coping with an adverse life experience. Achieving this adaptation is directly related to the way the family handles such an adverse experience. The family is expected to achieve adaptation by effectively reorganizing both its members and their relationships and investments (Walsh 2016). According to Walsh (2016), divorce is a process of successive destructive transitions, and adaptation can be achieved by meeting the changing requirements throughout the process.

As is seen, there are many approaches to understanding the divorce process. Each point of this transition of life can cause different difficulties, indicating the fulfillment of a number of requirements and goals. It is thought that the intervention programs might consist of appropriate psychotherapy goals and techniques if the basic requirements and problems caused by the process are well defined, rather than the process itself, and only this way can they support post-divorce adjustment. For example, meaning making to what has been experienced, the ability to develop new resources while using available resources, processing the grief and sadness caused by divorce are some of the effective goals for a successful transition process (Huff et al. 2020).

### **Assessment of Post-divorce Adjustment**

The multidimensional nature of the adjustment makes the issue of assessment important. How adjustment is defined naturally determines how it will be measured. It is seen that researchers who evaluate adjustment based on general well-being and

psychological well-being resort to appropriate measurement methods and discuss adjustment by excluding divorce-specific characteristics (Berman 1988, Doherty et al. 1989, Lorenz et al. 1997, Kramrei et al. 2007, Bowen and Jensen 2017). Some studies evaluate adjustment within the framework of certain divorce-specific and former relationship-specific characteristics. For example, Wang and Amato (2000) evaluated post-divorce adjustment within the framework of level of attachment to ex-spouse and certain questions related to divorce such as who has decided to divorce.

The multifaceted structure of divorce has led to the need to evaluate post-divorce adjustment in a more comprehensive and specific framework for this experience. Accordingly, the number of studies measuring adjustment by means of instruments specific to divorced individuals has begun to increase (Plummer and Koch-Hattem 1986, Sweeper and Halford 2006, Vukalovich and Caltabiano 2008). Sweeper and Halford (2006) developed The Psychological Adjustment to Separation Test based on the fact that the damage of emotional attachment due to the loss of a close relationship, the feeling of loneliness due to the weakening of social bonds and necessity of reorganization of parenting with the ex-spouse are issues related to adjustment. The scale consists of 26 items that evaluate adjustment in three different domains: “*former partner attachment*,” consisting of 8 items; “*lonely negativity*,” consisting of 11 items and “*coparenting conflict*,” consisting of 7 items. The scale is used to evaluate the adjustment to both divorce and to the termination of a romantic relationship.

Fisher Divorce/Separation Adjustment Scale, prominent with more comprehensive evaluation of adjustment to divorce/separation is often used in the relevant literature. The scale developed by Fisher (1976, 1978) consists of 100 items and evaluates the level of adjustment in six dimensions. These dimensions are: (1) “*self-worth*,” composed of evaluation of an individual about the self; (2) “*disentanglement from the relationship*,” evaluating the feelings and emotions about ex-spouse and the relationship; (3) “*anger*,” evaluating the anger directed at ex-spouse and the manner of experiencing such anger; (4) “*grief*,” evaluating the reactions to the loss of relationship, (5) “*trust and intimacy*,” evaluating the approach of an individual to a new possible relationship; (6) “*social self-worth*,” evaluating the individual socially repositioning him/herself and the sharing the separation in social environment. The Turkish version of the scale that has been adapted to various cultures has good psychometric properties for five factors other than “social self-worth” (Yilmaz and Fişiloğlu 2006). Yilmaz and colleagues (2021) created the short version of the scale consisting of 25 items for ease of application and to make it more useful in researches, thus revealed that its psychometric properties are similar to the long version.

## Discussion

Divorce, which means the termination of marriage life, has become a more common experience day by day as a result of

changing social, economic and cultural developments. Divorce rates drastically increasing in many countries and multifaceted impacts of divorce on an individual's life reveal the need for a better understanding of this life experience.

Divorce is a multidimensional crisis of life with its specific characteristics. Disputes arising from legal arrangements such as custody, alimony, compensation, division of property that are discussed upon the decision to divorce, might adversely affect quality of life and post-divorce adjustment of a divorced individual (Güler 2017, Demirbaş 2018). Similarly, economic problems and significant changes in the standards of living might emerge along with divorce (Asanjarani et al. 2017). Besides, weakening in relationships with both mutual friends and family of the ex-spouse leads to narrowing of social networks and interactions of divorced individuals (Kramrei et al. 2007). In addition, social prejudices against divorced individuals continue their existence despite the increase in divorce rates and might make this experience, which is already challenging, even more difficult (Herman 1974, Arkan 1996).

Holmes and Rahe (1967) note that divorce is a source of stress quite similar to the loss of a spouse through death. Accordingly, reviewed studies show that the termination of marriage might adversely affect divorced individuals both in psychological (Menaghan and Lieberman 1986, Emery and Wyer 1987, Doherty et al. 1989, Gove and Shin 1989, Lillard and Waite 1995, Lorenz et al. 1997, Hope et al. 1999, Amato 2000, Thuen 2000, Forste and Heaton 2004, Afifi et al. 2006) and in physiological terms (Zick and Smith 1991, Lillard and Waite 1995, Hemstrom 1996, Rogers 1996, Joung et al. 1997, Murphy et al. 1997, Sbarra et al. 2011).

The fact that divorce rates continue to increase despite such multidimensional impacts of the termination of marital relationship on an individual's life increases the importance of post-divorce adjustment process. Points where the approaches that both define and evaluate the adjustment and elucidate the post-divorce adjustment diverge and meet compel attention. It seems that post-divorce adjustment is defined in different ways, and the way the adjustment is defined affects how it is measured. It is seen that researchers explaining the post-divorce adjustment based on the existence or absence of psychological symptoms and well-being take indicators such as depression, anxiety, quality of life into account to evaluate the adjustment (Berman 1988, Doherty et al. 1989, Lorenz et al. 1997, Kramrei et al. 2007, Bowen and Jensen 2017). However, it is clear that post-divorce adjustment corresponds to a concept beyond them and has divorce-specific characteristics. Evaluating post-divorce adjustment using a divorce/separation-specific perspective (Fisher 1976, 1978, Sweeper and Halford 2006, Yilmaz and Fişiloğlu 2006, Yilmaz et al. 2021) upon accepting that it corresponds to a concept other than general adjustment indicators is thought to ensure both reliable and valid evaluation of adjustment.

It is seen that approaches to understanding divorce and post-divorce adjustment are based on two main points of view: *stage*



(Bohannon 1970, Kessler 1975, Wiseman 1975, Froiland and Hozman 1977, Levy and Joffe 1977, Pais and White 1979, Ahrons 1980, Kressel 1980, Hackney and Bernard 1990), and *stress and resilience* (Hill 1949, McCubbin and Patterson 1983, Patterson 1988, Patterson 2002, Walsh 2016). Stage approaches suggest that the divorced individual goes through several phases whose order and intensity can vary, and that post-divorce adjustment is part of this process. Stress and family resilience models, on the other hand, focus on the adjustment processes that the family will show upon the life crisis it encounters. It is noteworthy that these models focus on certain factors that predispose the family to crisis, adjustment, or resilience and interact with each other. Discussing the divorce experience in this way will enable an individual entering into the divorce process to know the stages s/he might go through, thus will make it easier to cope therewith (Korkut 2012). Furthermore, it will be useful for developing and implementing psychotherapy interventions that accurately determine the stage that the divorced individual is going through and effectively target the difficulties encountered during the stage s/he is going through. Besides, conceptualization specific to couple's situation in the early stages of divorce will shape therapeutic intervention to be applied, ensuring this fluctuating process to be experienced with minimum damage and even promoting the couple to reconsider their decision to separate (Pearce Plauche et al. 2016).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that divorce is a psychologically challenging life experience that creates confusion in people's lives and leads to the need to reorganize the individual in various areas. Accurate information and effective psychological support that a divorced individual will receive during this process, are considered critical. The studies reviewed in this article will provide insight in both theory and psychotherapy in terms of creating ideas for psychological approaches concerning the well-being of divorced individuals.

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