

Understanding the Patterns of Marital Dissolution in Mizoram, India

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Abstract—This study analyses the geographic, demographic, and socio-economic variations of divorce among ever-married women in Mizoram, based on secondary data from five rounds of the National Family Health Survey, conducted during 1992-93 to 2019-21. Descriptive statistical techniques, particularly bivariate analysis, have been used to identify variations in divorce prevalence by place of residence, age, educational attainment, occupation, household wealth, and number of living children. The prevalence of divorce in Mizoram fluctuated over the past three decades, with a persistent gap in urban and rural areas, with the former consistently reporting a higher prevalence. Notable inter-district variations are also observed, with Lunglei district exhibiting the highest prevalence in the most recent rounds. The divorce rate was highest among the age group 20–24, and generally declined with advancing age. Variations are also evident in relation to educational level, with women possessing secondary education as well as those employed in sales exhibiting a relatively higher divorce rate. Household wealth exhibits modest variation, with both the poorest and richest groups displaying the highest prevalence in varying periods. The divorce rate is also high among women with fewer or no living children, compared to others with two or more living children. The results of this research draw attention to the complexities involved in the phenomenon of divorces in Mizoram, which require a multidimensional policy approach that focuses on diversity. Future research incorporating multivariate and qualitative approaches is recommended to further elucidate the determinants of divorce in Mizoram.

Keywords: Mizoram, divorce, dissolution, separation, marital instability

I. INTRODUCTION

Mizoram has experienced significant social and economic transformations over recent decades, reshaping family structures and marital relations. Rising educational attainment, increased female labour force participation, and changing norms of partner selection have contributed to evolving expectations of marriage (Nongbri, 2001; Xaxa, 2004). These shifts have influenced attitudes toward marital stability and dissolution.

Evidence consistently shows that Mizoram has among the highest levels of marital dissolution in India, distinguishing it from most other states, underlining the need to examine its specific socio-cultural context (IIPS & ICF, 2021; Jacob & Chattopadhyay, 2016; Thadathil & Sriram, 2020). However, existing research has mostly focused on general demographic and socio-economic correlates, with limited systematic attention to Mizoram. There is a notable gap given the state's tribal population, relatively egalitarian gender norms, and community-based practices that may shape marital decision-making differently from elsewhere in India (Nongbri, 2001; Xaxa, 2004).

Divorce in this context has broader implications for individual well-being and family structures, making it a relevant sociological concern (Amato, 2010; Thadathil & Sriram, 2020). This study examines patterns of marital dissolution among women in Mizoram using five rounds of the National Family Health Survey (1992-93 to 2019-21). It provides a state-level, descriptive

assessment of variations across demographic and socio-economic characteristics, contributing baseline empirical evidence to a relatively under-researched context.

I.I. SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT OF MIZORAM

The state is largely inhabited by tribal communities (e.g., Mizo/Lushai, Lai, Mara, Hmar, Paite, etc.), where social organisation is oriented around clan-based kinship systems (Nongbri, 2001; Xaxa, 2004). Although predominantly patrilineal, these networks continue to influence marriage formation, support, and dispute resolution.

Mizo society is frequently distinguished by relatively egalitarian gender norms compared to many other parts of India. Higher female participation in education, employment, and public life may enhance women's autonomy and bargaining power, potentially lowering the social costs associated with exiting unsatisfactory marriages (Nongbri, 2001; Xaxa, 2004; Thadathil & Sriram, 2020).

Marriage practices are comparatively flexible, with greater acceptance of partner choice and less rigid institutional restraints. Community institutions-notably churches and local councils-play an important role in settling marital disputes. While these mechanisms foster reconciliation, they also facilitate separation when necessary, contributing to the procedural accessibility of divorce (Ngurthangpuii & Geetha, 2017; Zohmangaihi, 2023).

Taken together, these features- tribal social organisation, relatively egalitarian gender relations, flexible marital practices, and community-based conflict resolution- suggest a context in which the social and procedural barriers to divorce may be lower than in many other regions of India. At the same time, these patterns vary across districts and rural-urban areas, reflecting disparities in economic opportunities and social organisation.

I.II. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Social exchange theory provides a useful framework for understanding marital stability and dissolution. The theory argues that individuals evaluate relationships based on perceived rewards and costs (Donovan & Jackson, 1990). Rewards may include emotional support, companionship, and economic security, while costs may involve conflict, financial strain, or social pressures. When the perceived costs outweigh the rewards, the likelihood of marital dissolution increases (Kreager et al., 2013).

In the context of Mizoram, demographic and socio-economic factors may shape these evaluations. Higher education, employment opportunities, and economic independence might boost women's autonomy and bargaining power within marriage, potentially reducing dependence on unsatisfactory unions (Albrecht & Kunz, 1980). Similarly, employment associated with greater mobility or financial return may expand social networks and alternative opportunities, influencing marital decision-making.

Cultural and geographic contexts also affect the perceived costs and benefits of divorce. The relatively egalitarian gender norms observed in Mizoram may reduce the stigma surrounding marital dissolution and improve individual agency in marital decisions (Nongbri, 2001; Xaxa, 2004). Urban areas may further facilitate divorce through greater access to employment, counselling, and support systems, whereas rural areas may preserve stronger community pressures against dissolution. Overall, social exchange theory provides a useful basis for interpreting how demographic, socio-economic, and cultural factors shape marital dissolution in Mizoram.

I.III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Divorce is defined as the legal or permanent separation between spouses (Michael, 2013; Thadathil & Sriram, 2020). Research on marital dissolution has expanded considerably over the past few decades, highlighting the interplay of demographic, socio-economic, and cultural factors in shaping divorce (Amato, 2010; Zohmangaihi, 2023). Rather than operating in isolation, these factors interact within specific social contexts, making it crucial to understand empirical patterns in relation to broader theoretical frameworks and regional particularities such as those observed in Mizoram.

I.IV. DEMOGRAPHIC DETERMINANTS OF DIVORCE

A consistent finding across demographic research is the strong association between age at marriage and divorce. Early marriages are generally more vulnerable to dissolution due to inadequate emotional maturity, economic instability, and improper partner selection processes (Maitra & Gayathri, 2015; Rao & Sekhar, 2002; Thadathil & Sriram, 2020). Evidence from Mizoram also supports this pattern, where early unions and elopements have been linked to higher marital instability (Ngurthangpuii & Geetha, 2017). These findings align with life-course perspectives, which emphasise the role of timing and preparedness in shaping marital outcomes.

The intergenerational transmission of divorce is another factor identified in several global studies. The problem is that individuals who experienced the circumstance of parental divorce are at a high risk of divorcing themselves, especially when women are the affected party (Bergvall & Stanfors, 2022; Thadathil & Sriram, 2020). This suggests that family socialisation and early-life stability play important roles in shaping marital outcomes.

I.V. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND MARITAL DISSOLUTION

Education provides a complex and theoretically contested relationship with divorce. Classical economic theories argue that higher education enhances women's economic independence, thereby reducing the costs of exiting an unsatisfactory marriage (Becker, 1991). Education may also improve communication, negotiation, and partner selection, contributing to marital stability (Amato, 2010). Empirical studies in India reflect this dualism, with mixed findings across regions (Rao & Sekhar, 2002; Vasudevan et al., 2015; Thadathil & Sriram, 2020). In the context of Mizoram, where female literacy and labour force participation are relatively high, education may simultaneously expand autonomy and reshape expectations of marital quality.

I.VI. ECONOMIC FACTORS, EMPLOYMENT, AND HOUSEHOLD CONDITIONS

Economic conditions and employment dynamics are also central to understanding marital dissolution. Financial strain, unemployment, and economic uncertainty have been consistently associated with higher risks of divorce (Hansen, 2005; Jalovaara, 2003; Kiernan & Mueller, 1998). Women's employment brings contradictory dynamics: it might boost bargaining power and independence, but may also cause intra-household tensions related to changing gender roles (Amato, 2010).

Urbanisation and migration further influence marital stability by weakening traditional kinship support systems and exposing individuals to new social norms (Ariplackal & George, 2015; Prem Singh & Philip, 2014; Thadathil & Sriram, 2020). These dynamics are particularly pertinent in Mizoram's rapidly urbanising context.

I.VII. FERTILITY AND FAMILY STRUCTURE

Family structure, particularly the presence of children, has been consistently linked to marital stability. Studies reveal that childless couples or those with fewer children have a higher likelihood of divorce, as children tend to improve emotional and social commitment within marriage (Bernardi & Martínez-Pastor, 2011). At the same time, larger family sizes may introduce economic and caregiving pressures, indicating a complex and potentially non-linear relationship.

I.VIII. DURATION OF MARRIAGE AND RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS

The pattern of marital dissolution varies with marital duration. The early years of marriage are reported to be the most unstable period for instability, as partners are still in the stage of discovering compatibility and learning to manage adjustments (Becker, 1991; Jacob & Chattopadhyay, 2016). Long-term marriages may also suffer pressures in the form of child-rearing responsibilities, shifting interests, and emotional disengagement—that in turn may lead to divorce at later-life stages, though less frequently.

Domestic violence has remained a critical predictor of marital instability, with research indicating consistent linkages between partner violence and divorce (Thadathil & Sriram, 2020). More recently, digital communication technologies have emerged as new sources of marital tension, with social media use being linked to perceptions of infidelity and relationship breakdown (Clayton, 2014; Jacob & Chattopadhyay, 2016).

LIX. CULTURAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXTS: THE CASE OF NORTHEAST INDIA AND MIZORAM

Cultural context plays a decisive role in mediating these relationships. Comparative research across India reveals that divorce prevalence tends to be lower in regions with stronger kinship systems, higher stigma, and greater institutional barriers to marital dissolution (Jacob & Chattopadhyay, 2016; Thadathil & Sriram, 2020). In contrast, studies on north-east India, particularly Mizoram, highlight relatively higher divorce prevalence, attributed to more egalitarian gender norms, flexible marriage practices, and community-based mechanisms that regulate marital dissolution (Nongbri, 2001; Xaxa, 2004; Ngurthangpuii & Geetha, 2017). These features may reduce the perceived social and procedural costs of divorce, consistent with social exchange perspectives.

LX. RESEARCH GAP

Despite these insights, research on Mizoram remains limited and fragmented. Much of the existing work is qualitative or district-specific, offering valuable but context-bound insights (Ngurthangpuii & Geetha, 2017; Zohmangaihi, 2023). There is a lack of systematic, state-level quantitative analysis examining how multiple socio-demographic and economic factors relate to marital dissolution. Furthermore, few studies explicitly integrate theoretical perspectives with empirical evidence in this regional context.

In this context, the present study contributes by providing a structured, state-level analysis of divorce patterns using five rounds of nationally representative data. While primarily descriptive, it situates observed variations within broader theoretical and socio-cultural contexts, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of marital dissolution in Mizoram.

LXI. OBJECTIVES

1. To analyse the temporal trends in marital dissolution in Mizoram
2. To examine the socio-demographic and economic differentials in marital dissolution

II. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This study uses secondary data from five rounds of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), conducted during 1992–93, 1998–99, 2005–06, 2015–16, and 2019–21, to examine divorce patterns among ever-married women in Mizoram. The sample sizes for these rounds were 75, 63, 72, 370, and 378 ever-married women, respectively. While the NFHS provides representative estimates for the state, the small sample sizes in earlier rounds require cautious interpretation, particularly for disaggregated analyses.

The NFHS employs a multistage stratified sampling design, selecting rural and urban clusters using probability proportional to size, followed by systematic sampling of households. The unit of analysis in this study is ever-married women aged 15–49, as detailed marital information is collected only for women.

II.I. VARIABLES

Place of residence, age group, educational attainment, occupation, wealth index, number of living children

II.II. ANALYTICAL METHODS

Divorce Rate is calculated by using the following formula:

$$\text{Divorce Rate} = \frac{\text{Divorced Women 15-49}}{\text{Ever-married Women 15-49}} * 1,000$$

Descriptive statistical techniques, particularly bivariate analysis, are used to examine variations in divorce prevalence proportion by age, education, occupation, household wealth, district, and place of residence. All analyses were carried out using SPSS 25. Given the exploratory nature of the study and small sample sizes in some categories, the findings are interpreted as indicative patterns rather than causal relationships.

The temporal trends are presented using all five rounds (1992-93 to 2019-21) to examine broad changes in divorce prevalence over time. However, analyses of socio-demographic and background characteristics are restricted to the fourth and fifth rounds (2015-16 & 2019-21) because earlier rounds contain very small sub-group sample sizes, which limit the reliability of disaggregated estimates.

III. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

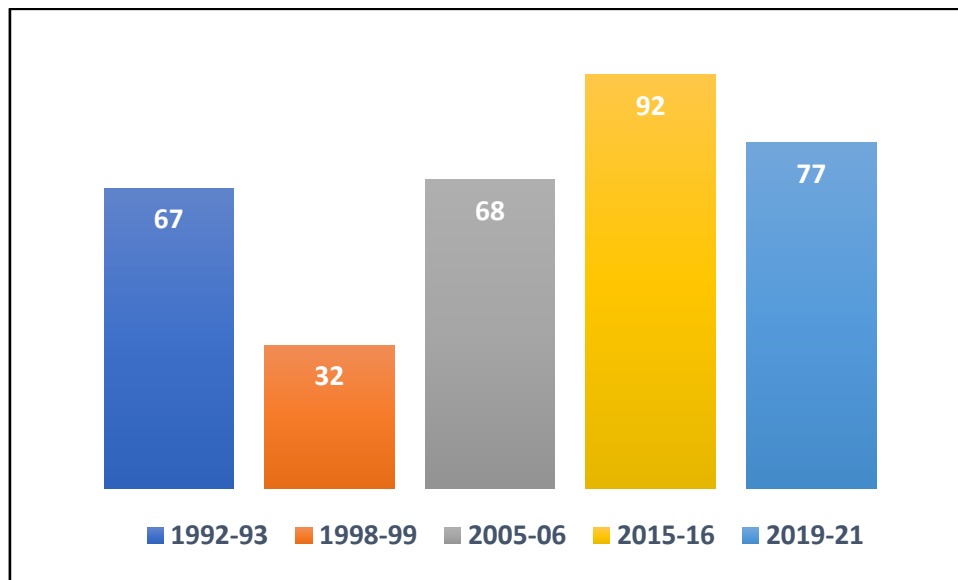
Since the nature of the study is descriptive and the sample size of certain subgroups is small, the focus of the analysis lies in describing patterns rather than drawing inferences on causality.

III.I. TEMPORAL TRENDS IN DIVORCE PREVALENCE

The divorce rate in Mizoram has witnessed quite a few fluctuations throughout the past three decades, reflecting evolving socio-cultural and economic conditions within the state. In 1992–93, the divorce rate stood at 67 per 1,000 ever-married women. This declined dramatically to 32 per 1,000 in 1998–99, marking the lowest level observed across the NFHS rounds. However, the divorce rate rebounded to 68 per 1,000 in 2005–06, signalling a renewed rise in marital dissolution. The trend continued into 2015–16, when the divorce rate peaked at 92 per 1,000 ever-married women. By 2019–21, the divorce rate declined moderately to 77 per 1,000, yet remained significantly higher than levels recorded in the early 1990s.

Overall, the temporal pattern appears to be a long-term upward trajectory in divorce rate despite short periods of decline. This trend might be attributed to certain changes that are taking place within the society of Mizoram.

Figure 1: Number of Divorced Women per 1,000 Ever-married Women in Mizoram



Source: National Family Health Survey, 1992-2021

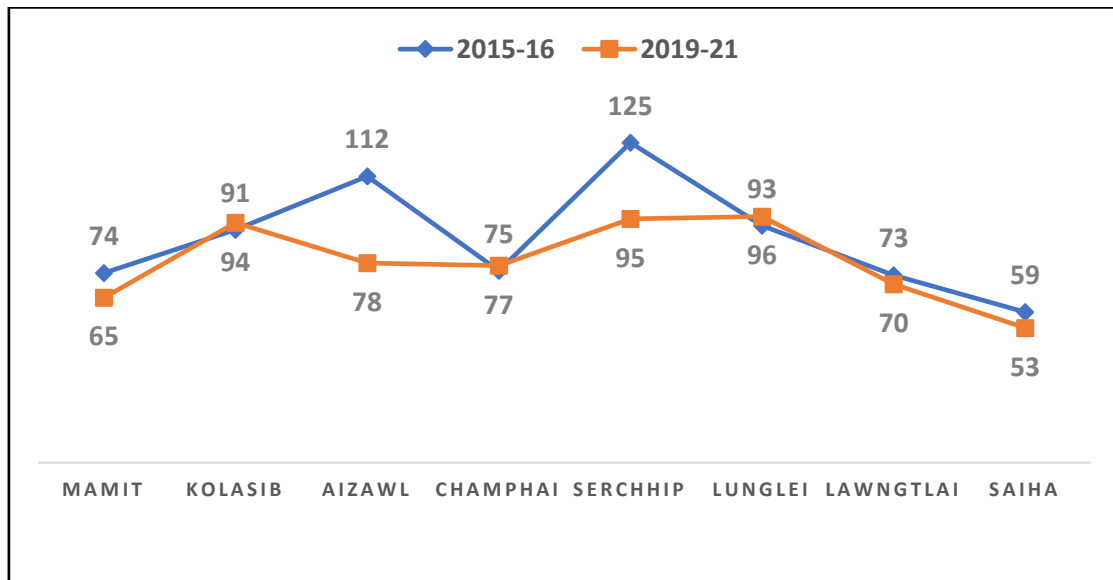
III.II. INTER-DISTRICT VARIATIONS

Substantial district-level variations emerged, which suggest the influence of local socio-cultural and economic contexts on marital stability. Aizawl and Serchhip districts, historically more urbanised with higher levels of literacy, showed some of the highest divorce rates in earlier rounds, though both districts experienced declines by 2019–21. Lunglei district consistently recorded high divorce rates, showing only slight variation across rounds. Saiha, dominated by the Mara community, reported

some of the lowest divorce rates, possibly reflecting cultural norms that make marriage formation and dissolution more financially or socially restrictive.

These divergences underline that marital dissolution is shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by district-specific cultural norms, economic conditions, and institutional contexts.

Figure 2: Number of Divorced Women per 1,000 Ever-married Women in the Districts of Mizoram



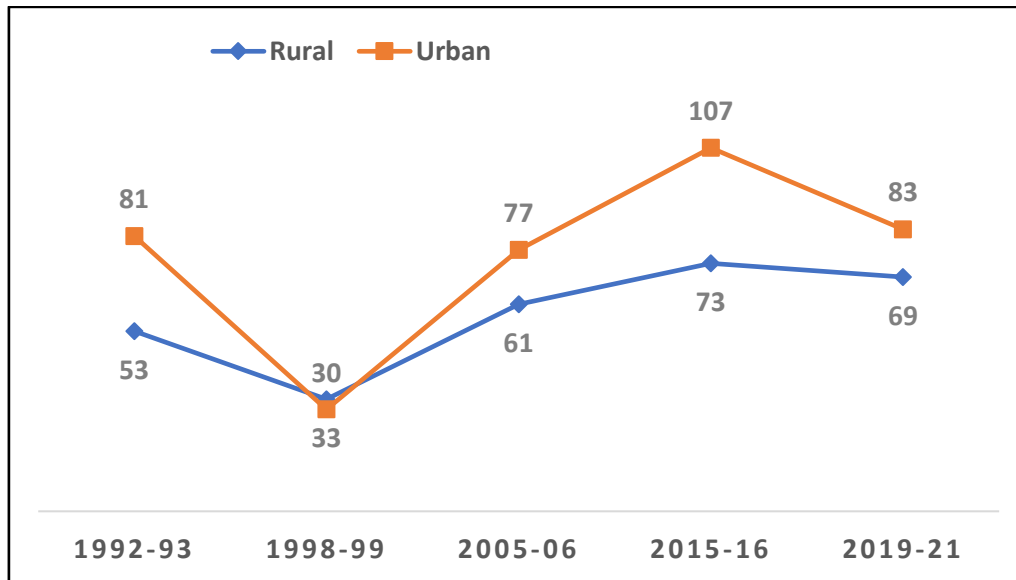
Source: National Family Health Survey, 2015-2021

III.III. RURAL-URBAN GAP

Mizoram consistently reveals a higher divorce rate in urban areas compared to its rural counterparts. In 1992–93, the divorce rate in urban areas was substantially higher, although the gap narrowed in 1998–99; it widened again in subsequent rounds. The divorce rate in urban areas reached the highest level in 2015–16 at 107 per 1,000 ever-married women, far exceeding the rural proportion of 73 per 1,000. During 2019–21, both rates have declined, yet the urban rates remained high.

These patterns suggest that urban environments provide greater autonomy, alternative opportunities, and easier access to legal mechanisms for marital dissolution. Conversely, rural areas may preserve stronger kinship ties and social norms that make divorce difficult. Overall, the persistent rural–urban differential reflects broader socio-cultural contrasts in how marital stability is shaped across Mizoram.

Figure 3: Number of Divorced Women per 1,000 Ever-married Women by Place of Residence in Mizoram

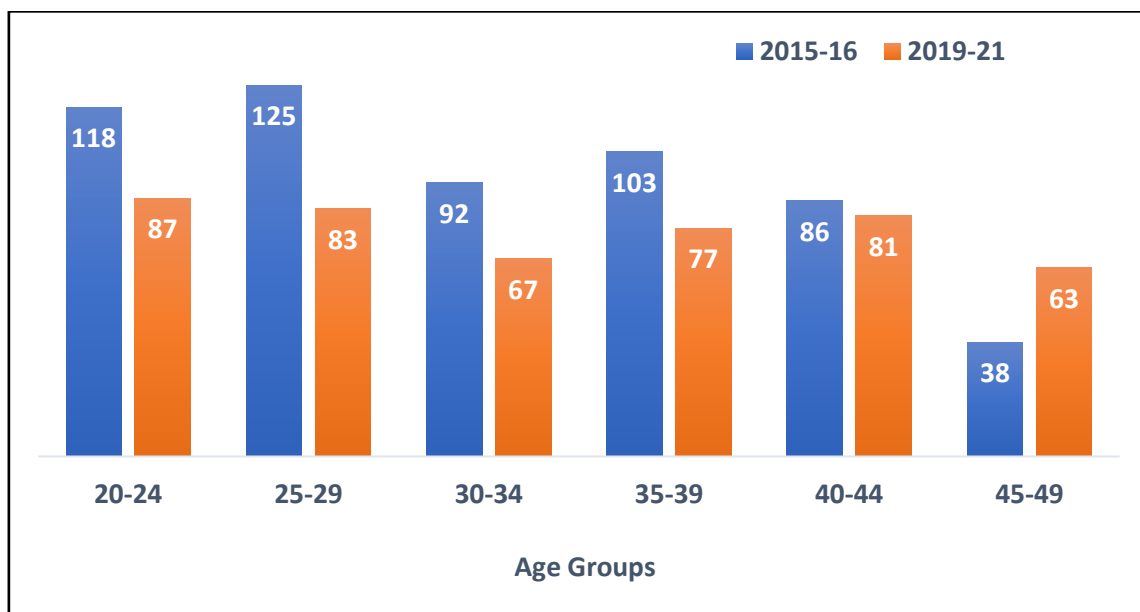


Source: National Family Health Survey, 1992-2021

III.IV. DIVORCE BY AGE GROUP

In the earlier rounds, the divorce rate was highest among women in the 20–24 and 25–29 age groups, with the rate declining for older ages. By 2019–21, all younger age groups exhibited declines, while divorce rose among women aged 45–49. This pattern aligns with the existing literature, indicating that early marriages—often formed with limited partner knowledge or financial stability—are more vulnerable to dissolution. The rising prevalence of divorce among older women may signify broader societal changes, including shifting expectations of marital satisfaction and greater autonomy in midlife.

Figure 4: Number of Divorced Women per 1,000 Ever-married Women by Age Groups



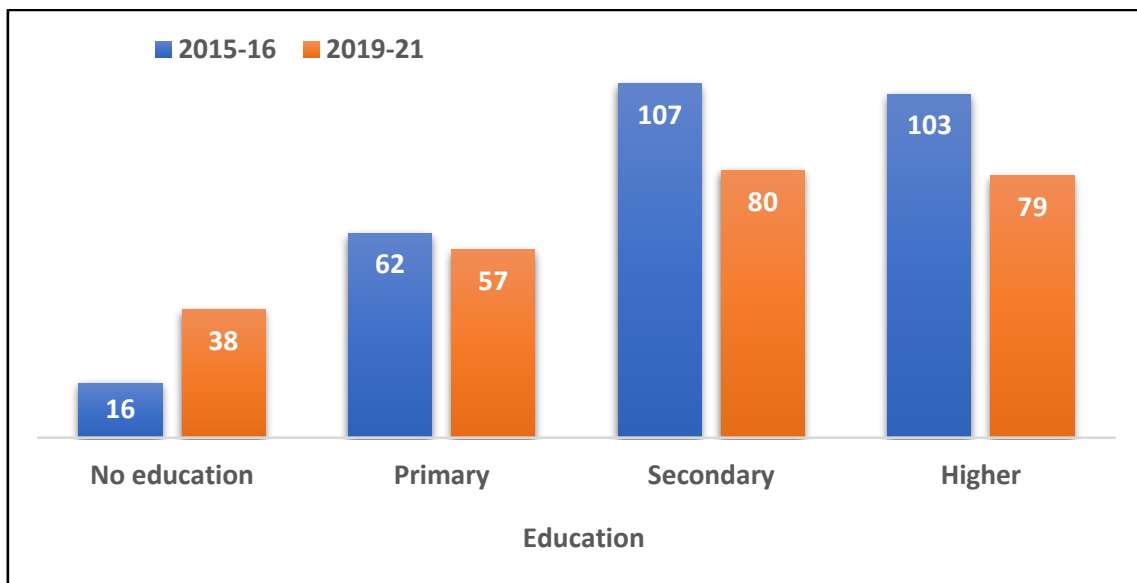
Source: National Family Health Survey, 2015-2021

III.V. DIVORCE BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Educational differences were notable across survey rounds. The prevalence of divorce is consistently higher among women with secondary education than among other groups, although their rates declined substantially by 2019–21. Divorce increased among women with no education over time, whereas it declined among women with primary and higher education.

These patterns suggest that education has a tangled link with marital expectations, bargaining power, and economic opportunities in complex ways. Women with secondary education may experience greater awareness of alternative life choices but may not yet have the economic resources that more highly educated women possess, influencing their reward–cost evaluations within marriage.

Figure 5: Number of Divorced Women per 1,000 Ever-married Women by Educational Attainment



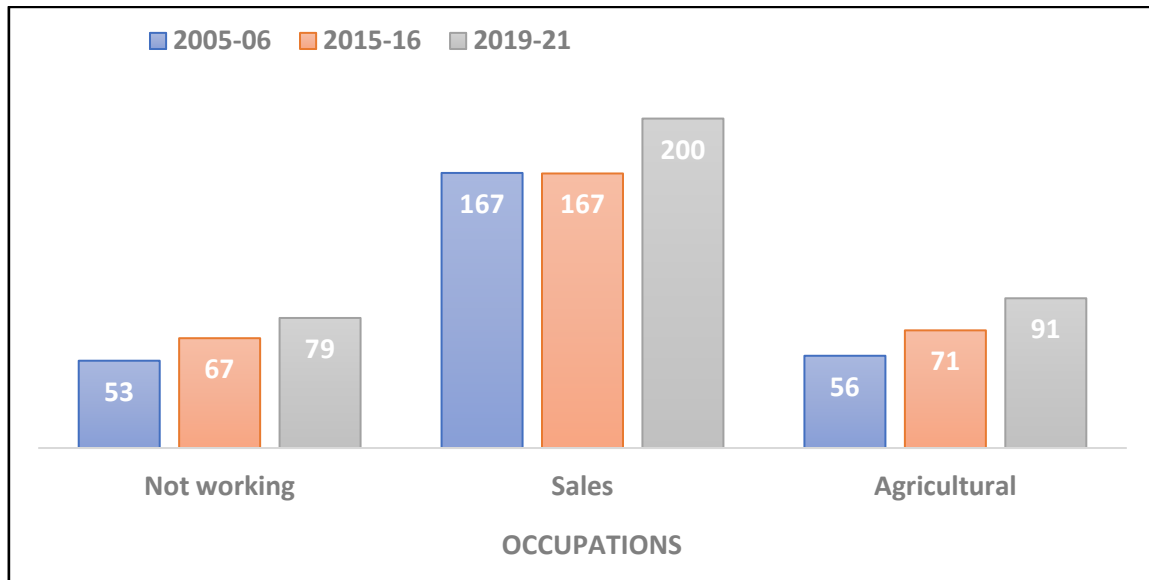
Source: National Family Health Survey, 2015-2021

III.VI. DIVORCE BY OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY

Occupational status was strongly associated with the prevalence of divorces. Women employed in sales consistently exhibited the highest divorce rates, rising to 200 per 1,000 in 2019–21. Divorce was also increased among women in agriculture and those who were not working, though at lower levels.

Occupations involving high mobility, interpersonal interaction, or irregular work hours may pose stressors that affect marital dynamics. Conversely, women not working may be more economically dependent, but their rising divorce rate suggests broader social shifts toward greater willingness to exit unsatisfactory marriages.

Figure 6: Number of Divorced Women per 1,000 Ever-married Women by Occupation



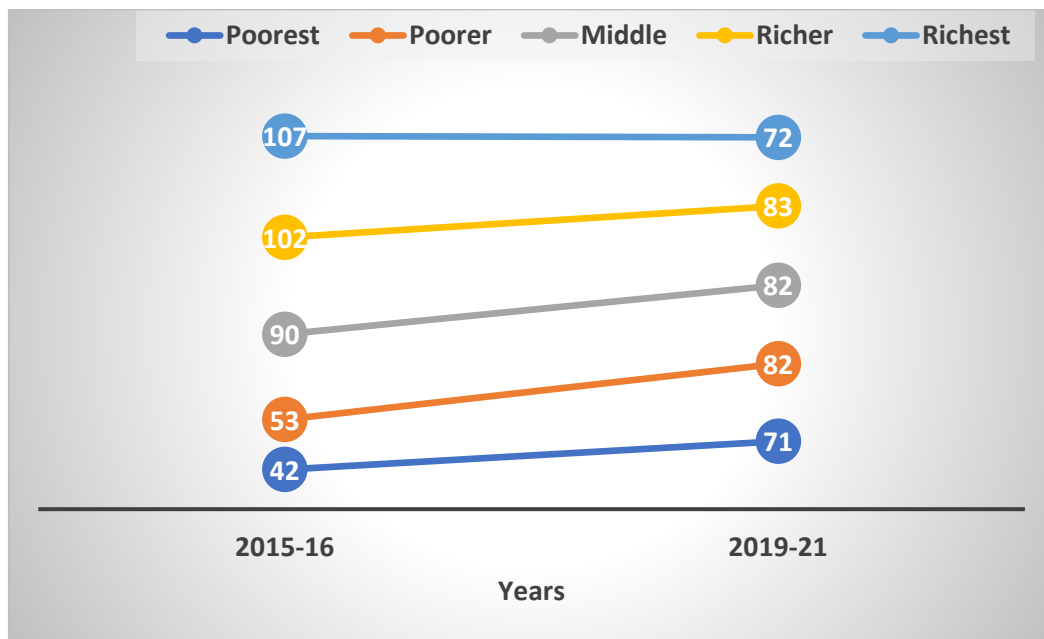
Source: National Family Health Survey, 2005-2021

III.VII. DIVORCE BY HOUSEHOLD WEALTH

The household wealth displayed a mixed pattern. The divorce rate increased among women in the poorest and poorer households. Rates declined among the middle, richer, and richest groups in 2019–21.

These findings indicate that economic struggle may heighten marital strain, while increased wealth may enhance resilience or access to support systems. The earlier high prevalence of divorce among the richest households suggests that economic independence may also reduce the perceived costs of dissolving a marriage, a pattern consistent with social exchange theory.

Figure 7: Number of Divorced Women per 1,000 Ever-married Women by Household Wealth



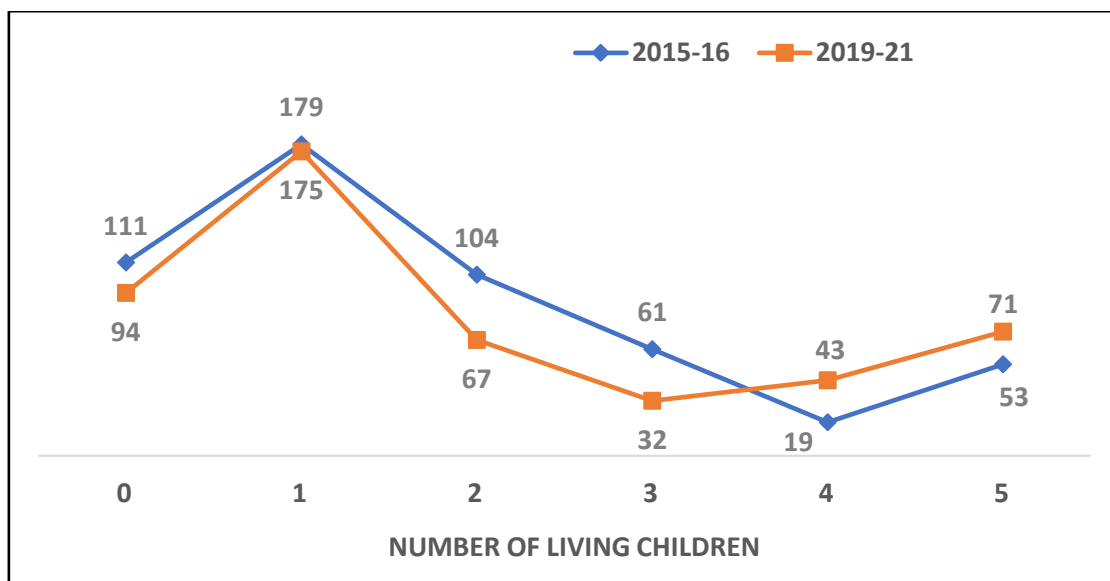
Source: National Family Health Survey, 2015-2021

III.VIII. DIVORCE BY NUMBER OF LIVING CHILDREN

The size of the family had a strong inverse relationship with divorce in most cases. Childless women or women with one child had the highest divorce rate across rounds. Divorce decreased among women with two or three children, while those with four or five children saw modest increases in 2019–21.

These patterns align with literature suggesting that child-rearing responsibilities increase marital commitment, though large families may introduce financial and emotional stresses that offset this effect.

Figure 8: Number of Divorced Women per 1,000 Ever-married Women by Number of Living Children



Source: National Family Health Survey, 2015-2021

IV. SUMMARY

Across demographic and socio-economic dimensions, the results reveal consistent associations between divorce and factors such as place of residence, age, education, occupation, wealth, and number of living children. Urban residence, lower educational levels, low household wealth and fewer living children were linked with higher divorce prevalence. District-level patterns highlight the importance of cultural context, while temporal trends reflect changing social attitudes toward marriage and dissolution in Mizoram.

V. LIMITATION

Regression analysis was explored but not included due to insufficient sample size and unstable model estimates. Future studies using larger datasets or pooled survey data may provide more reliable inferential results.

VI. DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that divorce prevalence in Mizoram remains relatively high compared to much of India, consistent with earlier research on North East India (Nongbri, 2001; Xaxa, 2004; Jacob & Chattopadhyay, 2016; Thadathil & Sriram, 2020). This pattern can be interpreted in light of the region’s socio-cultural context, including relatively egalitarian gender norms, flexible marriage practices, and lower stigma surrounding divorce. From a social exchange perspective, these features may reduce the perceived social and institutional costs of marital dissolution. The higher prevalence observed in urban areas further supports

this interpretation, as urban settings may offer greater economic opportunities, autonomy, and access to support systems, thereby facilitating marital exit (Ariplackal & George, 2015; Premsingh & Philip, 2014).

Demographic and socio-economic patterns broadly align with existing literature but also reflect context-specific dynamics. Demographic and socio-economic patterns broadly align with findings linking early marriage and lower preparedness to marital instability (Maitra & Gayathri, 2015; Rao & Sekhar, 2002). The non-linear relationship with education, particularly higher prevalence among women with secondary education, suggests an intermediate stage of empowerment, where aspirations may increase without corresponding economic security (Becker, 1991; Amato, 2010). Similarly, occupational and wealth differentials indicate that both economic strain and economic independence can influence marital dissolution, while lower prevalence among women with more children reflects the stabilising role of family responsibilities (Bernardi & Martínez-Pastor, 2011).

Some patterns require cautious interpretation. The persistently high prevalence in Lunglei district may reflect local socio-economic or cultural factors, though the data do not allow firm conclusions. Likewise, the sharp decline observed in 1998-99 is likely influenced by small sample sizes rather than a substantive demographic shift. Overall, the results highlight that marital dissolution in Mizoram is shaped by the interaction of socio-economic conditions and a distinct cultural context. Given the descriptive nature of the analysis, future research using larger samples and multivariate or qualitative approaches is needed to better understand the underlying mechanisms.

VII. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Target early-stage marital vulnerability: Higher prevalence among younger women highlights the need for premarital and early-marriage programmes focused on relationship skills, conflict resolution, and informed partner choice.

Strengthen urban support systems: The rural-urban differential suggests expanding accessible counselling and support services in urban areas, where greater autonomy is accompanied by weaker kinship support.

Address economic vulnerability: Associations with education, occupation, and wealth indicate the importance of improving women's economic security to reduce financial stress and enhance marital stability.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the multifaceted nature of divorce in Mizoram, revealing how demographic characteristics, socio-economic conditions, and local contexts shape patterns of marital dissolution. Although divorce rates fluctuate over time, the overall trend suggests increasing acceptance of marital dissolution within the state. Urban residence, lower educational attainment, low household wealth and a smaller number of living children emerge as key correlates of higher divorce prevalence. These findings underline the need for targeted interventions that support young couples, address economic pressures, and provide accessible relationship counselling, particularly in high-divorce districts. Future research using qualitative insights or larger datasets would further illuminate the underlying dynamics and strengthen evidence-based policy responses.

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