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Road to Divorce in Tanzania: What are the Main Factors?

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Abstract

This study examines the road to divorce in Tanzania from 2018 to 2022 based on court records filed by RITA (Registration, Insolvency and Trustee Registration Agency). It applies Bayesian negative binomial regression appropriate for count data and small samples using Markov chain Monte Carlo simulation and Gibbs sampling. The results show that the mean coefficients for conflict, cruelty, desertion, alcohol addiction, adultery, consummate failure, financial difficulties, misconduct, communication problems, jealousy and insecurity; and lack of commitment all have positive effects on divorce in Tanzania. The road to top five factors leading divorce in the country includes conflicts, failure to consummate, adultery, desertion and cruelty. Our study provides insights into divorce ending intervention in Tanzania.

Keywords: Divorce; Adultery; Conflict; Cruelty; Bayesian regression; Tanzania

JEL Classification Codes: C11, J12

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, many families have become more dynamic and complex, and divorce rates have risen, including in Tanzania. For instance, Citizen News (2017) reported that the divorce rate in Tanzania has almost doubled in six years (2009 to 2015) and about half of people who have reached marriage age have not yet married for fear of the dynamic and complex situation of a future marriage. The report showed that the divorce rate increased from 1.1% in 2008/09 to 2.1% in 2014/15 (Citizen News, 2017). This means that for every 100 people in the country who have reached marriageable age, two are currently divorced. Moreover, Citizen News (2022) highlights that divorce rate in Tanzania is alarming, with Dar es Salaam alone records more than 300 divorces each month.

The motivation for this study is threefold. First, according to available statistics from RITA (Registration, Insolvency and Trustee Registration Agency), the number of marriage divorces in Tanzania rose from 397 in 2018 to 523 in 2021, before falling to 345 in 2022 (RITA, 2022).¹ The increased trajectory in divorce rate has raised serious concerns to parents, general public, religious leaders and for children who are more likely to succumb into poverty trap and other socio-economic vulnerabilities. Shockingly, out of 523 court judgments filed at RITA in 2021, over 50% were initiated by women (RITA, 2022). Moreover, available statistics show that women between the ages of 25 and 54 have had to file for divorce with RITA.

Secondly, while divorce remains one of the most stressful life events that affect adversely the well-being of divorcees and children, the literature on the determinants of divorce remains mixed and far from being settled (Her and Xiong, 2023; Scott *et al.*, 2013; Amato and Previti, 2003). The reasons for divorce are many and varied--cultural, economic and social factors (Kalmijn and Poortman, 2006). The extant literature, for instance, shows that women's employment, financial stress and difficulties, modernization, and globalization are the main factors in divorce (Kalmijn and Poortman, 2006; Mo, 2016). Other literature shows that marrying at an early age, having less education and income, frequent conflicts and arguments, and a lack of commitment can be causes of divorce (Scott *et al.*, 2013). Alcohol consumption is one of the main reasons couples file for divorce (Salvatore *et al.*, 2022). This means that the divorce rate is higher if you are married to an alcoholic. In fact, adultery is also a ground for divorce (Loader, 2015).

Thirdly, it is worth-noting that the literature on divorce is perhaps one of the oldest in both sociology and economic fields. However, the determinants of divorce across the globe remain an area of research inquiry due to differences in cultural and economic circumstances. Indeed, differences in the determinants of divorce across the world is largely attributable to differences in methodology and scope of the study. Clearly, while the empirical literature on the determinants of divorce is voluminous, it is nonetheless, ironical to notice that such a literature is almost nonexistent in Tanzania. The paucity of research is staggering given the increased trajectory of divorce that the country has observed in the recent past. Based on this inherent shortcoming in the literature, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first study that attempts to investigate empirically the determinants of divorce in Tanzania.

This study contributes to the empirical literature by examining the road to divorce in Tanzania and identifies the mechanisms that contribute to marriage divorce in the country. This offers a new perspective for understanding family dynamics and other aspects related to divorce. The

¹ Here and subsequent citation implies data set from RITA

main novelty of this study is that it fills the gap missing in the existing literature by using Bayesian negative binomial regression and updated annual quantitative data from RITA for the period 2018-2022. The main research question is: what are the main factors of divorce in Tanzania in 2018-2022? Our empirical results reveal that top five factors leading divorce in the country includes conflicts, failure to consummate, adultery, desertion and cruelty. Our study provides insights into divorce ending intervention in Tanzania.

The remainder of this study is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on the determinants of divorce. While section 3 describes the methodology and data, section reports and discusses the estimated results. Section 5 concludes with policy implications.

2. Literature Review

There are two major strands that dominate the literature on divorce: sociological and economic literature. The sociological literature is premised on the exchange theory, involving three types of factors; namely, benefits of the current marriage, alternatives to that marriage, and barriers to dissolution (Udry, 1981; Levinger, 1979). Social exchange theory posits that if the benefit of the current marriage (e.g., companionship, financial Security, love and respect, sexual affection, mutual needs satisfaction, long – term investments) is lower than the cost (e.g., lack of communication, sexual problems, infidelity, physical, emotional, psychological abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, economic strain, health and physical disability, long – term disenchantment and gender role conflict), then such a relationship may be abandoned.

Rusbult (1983) argues that when a spouse realizes that marriage no longer fulfills important needs and perceives that attractive alternatives are available, the decision to remain in the marriage remain questionable. Alternative to marriage may include things like the availability of more rewarding lifestyle, freedom, new interpersonal relationship, personal growth and fulfillment. Levinger (1982) asserts that barriers to divorce may be emotional, religious and moral commitments that a spouse feels toward their marriage or children. Moreover, barriers may emerge from external pressures from friends, relatives, church, presence of children, loss of income or assets, social isolation and stigma, disapproval of friends and family, anger and dependency of spouse, and obligation to marital bond. A barrier to dissolution of marriage is linked to the spouses' investment of time that strengthen rather than worsening of relationship (Levinger, 1982). Thus, social exchange theory provides underlying framework that enhances our understanding of the cognitive processes that couples may deploy to review whether to continue or end the marriage.

On the other hand, the economic literature pioneered by Becker *et al* (1977), Becker (1981) postulates that a person's decision to marry or to divorce is largely dictated by expected utility. A person is more likely to marry when the utility expected from marriage exceeds that expected from remaining single or from additional search for a more suitable mate. Analogously, a married person would terminate his (or her) marriage when the utility anticipated from becoming single or marrying someone else exceeds the loss in utility from separation, including losses due to physical separation from one's children, division of joint assets, legal fees, and so forth. Couples are more likely to divorce if doing so is expected to raise their welfare.

It is worth noting that both sociological and economic literature share commonalities. First, they both postulate a rational evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of the current and any alternative marriages, and more importantly, they both include factors that act as barriers to

divorce. The upshot of these models is that they do not allow an exclusive categorization of variables used to test them. Divorce is a complex process that can hardly be explained by theory of exchange alone, nor can it be explained by economic literature exclusively. The question of which exchange or economic variables that are ultimately important in forecasting the decision to divorce is difficult to ascertain. And, Becker's model, is largely criticized because it uses economic reasoning in nonmarket problems such as divorce.

Interestingly, the empirical literature on the determinants of divorce is largely inconclusive when examined within the lens sociological and economic approaches. On the sociological approach, empirical results assert that lack of communication, emotional abuse, intimacy, religious factors, infidelity, alcoholism (Stephen and Caldwell, 1995; Ludwig, 2005; Her and Xiong, 2023) duration of marriages (Scott and Glenna, 1986; Baffour, 2001; Joseph *et al.*, 2021) and presence of children are the key drivers of divorce (Hewitt, 2009). However, the empirical findings in the sociological approach remain ambiguous. For instance, Amato and Previti, (2003) using data from the US show that children acted as a barrier to divorce only when they were in the preschool ages largely because of the increased costs of care for preschool children.

On the economic approach, empirical findings hold that employment, financial position, and the level of education remain the main determinants of divorce (Spitze and South 1985; Don Swenson, 1996; Ono, 1998; South, 2001; Baffour & Broughton, 2006; Teachman, 2010; Raz-Yurovich, 2012; Maslauskaitė, *et al.*, 2015; Cherchye *et al.*, 2021; Joseph *et al.*, 2021). Just like in the sociological approach, the empirical findings within the economic domain remain at best mixed. For instance, Teachman (2010) finds that the economic resources amongst the United States's women are inextricably linked to the risk of divorce for Whites women but not for Blacks. Indeed, it is generally documented that women who are capable economically to take care of themselves – an attribute that is usually is linked to higher levels of education – are far more likely to initiate divorce than women who are economically weak to sustain themselves. Scott and Glenna, 1986) using data from the young and mature women samples holds that the effect of wife's education appears to decrease the probability of divorce at early marital durations but such a probability is likely to increase in future.

In brevity, it is plausible to argue that the literature on the determinants of divorce is both rich and diverse but the estimated results from an empirical investigation remain mixed, albeit. This flaw is typically attributed to methodology employed, estimation techniques, sample type, geographical location, cultural background and economic reasons. In terms of methodology, a cursory glance on the literature reveals that while Scott and Spitze (1986) and Don Swenson (1996) use logistic regression, Ono (1998) and Hewitt (2009) used event history, Maslauskaitė *et al.* (2015) employed Poisson regression and Cherchye *et al.* (2021) employed a structural model of consumer-producer households. Moreover, with an exception of the study by Howland and Koenen (2014) in Tanzania which examined polygamous and the law of marriage, majority of reviewed studies in the current study have concentrated in developed countries, and very few in sub-Saharan Africa. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first empirical study that has attempted to explore the determinants of divorce in Tanzania by using Bayesian Methodology.

3. Data sources and methodology

3.2 Data

The data set for divorce and its causes was collected by RITA (Registration, Insolvency and Trustee Agency) in Tanzania over the period between 2018 and 2022. The original data were reviewed, manipulated and coded; and finally for empirical investigation. One caveat worth-mentioning in our data is that not all divorce decrees from courts are automatically submitted to the RITA. Put it differently, couples who divorce in the court are not required to submit their divorce documents for registration with RITA. Notwithstanding this caveat, we strongly believe that our sample reflects the process of data generation that can be used to identify the roads to divorce in Tanzania.

3.2 Modeling techniques

The Bayesian approach outperforms classical maximum likelihood (i.e., frequentist) estimation in terms of goodness of fit, especially for small sample sizes and complex models like the one used in this study (see, Fu, 2015). We used Bayesian negative binomial regression because it is a convenient method for modeling non-negative and over-dispersed count data. The method provides a detailed description of the proposed method and its implementation using a Metropolis-Hastings-in-Gibbs algorithm using Stata version 17. We used default priors and Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) sample size simulated to 10,000 and burn in of 2500. The technique is only feasible in the presence of prior knowledge of the data and likelihood. The inference is possible to establish through posterior estimates. In essence, the MCMC is a simulation-based method of inferring posterior means (see Pillow and Scott, 2012). Therefore, we modeled Bayesian negative binomial regression for the divorced marriage in Tanzania as follows:

Let Y_{ij} be divorce marriage counts occurring during the period in Tanzania with $i = 1, \dots, n$ & $j = 1$. Also let $X_{ij} = (x_{ij}^1, \dots, x_{ij}^p)^T$ corresponds to covariate vector and $B_j = (B_j^0, B_j^1, \dots, B_j^p)^T$ be the unknown regression coefficient and θ_j be the dispersion parameter of the underlying negative binomial (NB) distribution given as (X_{ij}, B_j, θ_j) , Y_{ij} is assumed to follow the NB distribution expressed as follows:

$$Y_{ij} | X_{ij}, B_j, \theta_j \sim \text{NB}(\lambda_{ij} \theta_j) \quad \text{Where } \lambda_{ij} = \exp(X_{ij}^T B_j) \quad (1)$$

The condition mean and variance of Y_{ij} are given by:

$$E(Y_{ij} | \alpha_{ij}, \theta_{ij}) = \frac{\theta_{ij}}{\alpha_{ij}(1 - \theta_{ij})} = \mu_{ij}$$

$$\text{Var}(Y_{ij} | \alpha_{ij}, \theta_{ij}) = \frac{\theta_{ij}}{\alpha_{ij}(1 - \theta_{ij})^2} = \mu_{ij}(1 + \alpha_{ij}\mu_{ij})$$

Therefore, Y_{ij} followed a normal distribution with mean of zero (0) and variance of one hundreds (100). θ_j is assumed to follow a gamma distribution. To complete the Bayesian model specification, we give appropriate default/normal priors to the corresponding model parameters (conflict among married couples, failure to consummate, adultery, desertion, cruelty, conflict

over family responsibility, financial incompatibility, and lack of commitment, jealousy and insecurity, lack of commitment, misbehaving and alcohol addiction).

In the Bayesian technique, three factors are crucial: the prior distribution (i.e., belief of information about unknown parameters), the likelihood (i.e., data evidence) of generating the posterior probability distribution. The three terms are related in the following way:

$$\text{Posterior probability} = \text{likelihood} \times \text{prior.} \quad (2)$$

4. Results estimation and discussion

Table 1 shows that the total numbers of divorce from 2018 to 2022 are 659. The top 5 ranking show that conflict among married couples is the leading cause of divorce in Tanzania, followed by failure to consummate, adultery, desertion and cruelty. Other causes leading to divorce in Tanzania include conflict over family responsibility, financial incompatibility, lack of commitment, communication problem, jealousy and insecurity, lack of intimacy, emotional/physical abuse, alcohol addiction and unrealistic expectation.

Table 1: Divorce Statistics in Tanzania

Causes of Divorce	Divorce		Total Divorce	Ranking
	2018-2020	2021-2022		
Adultery	59	29	88	3
Cruelty	45	21	66	5
Conflict over family responsibility	16	6	22	9
Financial incompatibility	10	4	14	13
Conflict	77	27	104	1
Failure to consummate	71	25	96	2
Communication problem	24	8	32	7
Desertion	43	29	72	4
Lack of commitment	14	7	21	10
Jealousy and insecurity	18	5	23	8
Lack of intimacy	13	6	19	11
Consent	8	8	16	12
Impotence	1	1	2	16
Misbehaving	37	13	50	6
Emotional/physical abuse	14	2	16	12
Alcohol addiction	6	4	10	14
Unrealistic expectation	7	1	8	15
Total	463	196	659	

Source: RITA Filed divorce database (2022)

Table 2 shows Bayesian negative regression results for the main key determinants of marriage divorce in Tanzania. It is clear from table 2 that the mean coefficients for conflict, cruelty, desertion, alcohol addiction, adultery, failure to consummate, financial difficulties, misbehaving, communication problems, jealousy and insecurity, and lack of commitment have positive effects on divorce in Tanzania. The coefficients of these parameters are within the positive confidence interval probability of 0.95, confirming a positive association between divorce and these parameters of interest.

Table 2: Bayesian Posterior Estimates for Divorce in Tanzania

Parameter	Mean	Std deviation	Credible interval (95%)	
Conflict	.013	.002	.008	.018
Cruelty	.028	.011	.009	.040
Alcohol addiction	.344	.078	.210	.472
Adultery	.023	.004	.015	.031
Desertion	.049	.017	.029	.070
Failure to consummate	.015	.007	.009	.021
Financial difficult	.114	.047	.068	.161
Misbehaving	.027	.023	.015	.041
Communication problem	.043	.018	.026	.061
Jealousy and insecurity	.053	.017	.031	.075
Lack of commitment	.107	.149	.003	.346
Constant	3.23	.421	2.53	3.93

Source: Authors computation (2023)

Diagnostic statistics (i.e. trace, kernel density, histogram, autocorrelation) show that all parameters were converged to equilibrium and ready for interpretation. Figure 1 shows the diagnostic statistics.

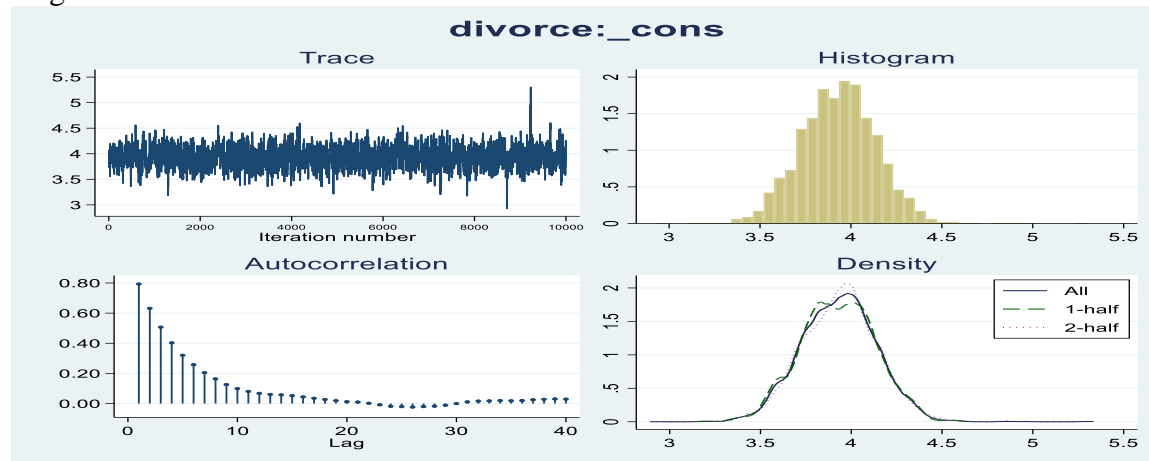


Figure 1: Bayesian diagnostic statistics (MCMC convergence)

All MCMC converge to equilibrium using trace plots. After convergence of each parameter to posterior distribution, the results are ready for implementation (See, Byaro *et al.*, 2023; Byaro and Msafiri, 2021; Byaro *et al.*, 2018; Byaro and Musonda, 2017; Byaro and Musonda, 2016).

Given the key findings in Tables 1 and 2, we begin our discussion by focusing on the causes and key mechanisms that lead to divorce and possible interventions to stem the rise in divorce. Conflicts that lead to divorce can arise through various mechanisms. One mechanism is the conflicting material interests of the spouses, with each side trying to maximize their share of money, property, and resources, leading to conflict (Hopper, 2001). Psychological reactions to the hurt, shame, or humiliation of divorce can also contribute to conflict (Cohen and Finzi-Dottan, 2013). Collectively, these mechanisms can contribute to the conflict that ultimately leads to divorce. One way to avoid conflict in marriage is to use negotiation, as a conflict resolution strategy can help resolve co-parenting conflicts after a divorce.

Adultery is one of the main reasons for the dissolution of a marriage under the law. This applies to both men and women, whether the marriage was civil, religious, or traditional. A petitioner for divorce must provide evidence that the respondent has engaged in adulterous relationships more than once and that the relationship(s) continues despite protests from the petitioner. Adultery can lead to divorce due to a variety of factors. One of the main factors is dissatisfaction with the primary relationship, which can contribute to seeking fulfillment outside of marriage (Fisher, 2015). Poor communication between couples, financial problems, and the dominance of one spouse over the other are also important factors that can lead to adultery and eventual divorce. Additionally, issues such as misbehaving, desertion, alcohol abuse, and financial difficulties are often aspects of broken marriages, although they may not be the direct cause of divorce. Instead, these problems can escalate a crisis and contribute to the dissolution of emotional ties, which can lead to divorce (Rasmussen and Ferraro, 1979). Overall, adultery can be a result of various factors, including relationship dissatisfaction, personality traits, and specific issues within the marriage that can ultimately lead to divorce.

To prevent adultery from leading to divorce, it is important to focus on specific actions, feelings, and attitudes, and to have open and honest communication with your spouse. It is crucial to build trust and respect within the marriage and to address any issues and concerns individually. Expressing mutual appreciation and affirming respect and affection can help maintain a positive and healthy relationship (Markman *et al.*, 2022). In addition, understanding the consequences of adultery, such as the loss of domestic peace and the negative effects it can have on children, can be discouraging. Forgiveness and choosing to resolve problems rather than divorce can also help prevent marriage failure.

Tanzanian law lists cruelty as one of the grounds that can lead the court to grant a divorce. The law recognizes mental or physical cruelty inflicted on the applicant's children, if any. Physical attacks on the applicant, resulting in physical or mental harm, have resulted in the breakdown of many marriages. Many divorces cases stem from constant fighting and assault, all of which are criminal in nature. In some cases, such acts are committed in the presence of children, affecting not only the spouse but also the children. Evidence of cruelty may come from a police report or other medical examination report. Wife beating and domestic violence are also among the top five causes of divorce in Tanzania. Women have been the primary users of cruelty in divorce, with most allegations of cruelty being made by wives against their husbands. The increasing complaints of wife beating and psychological cruelty in marriages led to many women leaving the marital home. A spouse's refusal to have sex could also be viewed as cruelty (Snell, 1988).

Consummate love is considered the highest form of love in a relationship. It is a complete and balanced form of love that many people aspire to, especially in romantic relationships. Our

findings show that lack of consummate leads to divorce. A lack of emotional support and incompatibility were the most frequently cited reasons for divorce for women, regardless of their socioeconomic status (Dolan and Hoffman, 1998). Dissatisfaction in material, sexual, emotional silence, physical distance and psychological aspects of marital satisfaction can lead to divorce (Gharaibeh *et al.*, 2023). It is also worth noting that lack of trust, lack of intimacy, commitment and communication are key causes of marriage failure and lead to divorce (Zineldin, 2019). To avoid failure of consummation leading to divorce, couples should take personal responsibility for their sexuality, restore intimacy, promoting open communication and add erotic stimulation (McCarthy, 1997).

Our findings show that poor communication between couples in Tanzania leads to divorce. Decreased communication between married partners is associated with an increased likelihood of divorce (Markman *et al.*, 2010). Negative communication, both observed and self-reported, is strongly associated with divorce (Stanley *et al.*, 2002). Couples feel happy communicate more often and openly to avoid conflict. Financial disagreements can lead to negative communication and conflict between couples, which may accelerate divorce. Overall, efficient management of communication is essential for marital satisfaction and can be a contributing factor to divorce if not effectively managed.

Desertion is a significant problem in marriages in Tanzania, when one spouse leaves the other without a valid reason. Among the reasons leading to desertion are cruelty, adultery, alcohol abuse, infidelity, and lack of interest in family life, lack of responsibility and lack of understanding between spouses (Butler, 2006; Nurhasanah, 2017). The most common way to put an end desertion is for the spouses to decide to live together again as husband and wife. Alcohol addiction is associated with an increased risk of divorce, particularly in couples where one or both partners are heavy drinkers (Chinnusamy *et al.*, 2021). Spouse stopping drinking is one of the best ways to end an alcohol-related divorce.

We end our discussion with the conclusion that conflicts between married couples, failure of consummate, adultery, desertion and cruelty are the main causes of divorce in Tanzania. Other causes include conflicts over family responsibilities, financial incompatibility, and lack of commitment, jealousy and insecurity, lack of intimacy, consent, impotence, emotional/physical abuse, alcohol addiction, and unrealistic expectations. Overall, a comprehensive solution to mitigating a divorce is to address the conflicts, poor communication, and other challenges that couples face during marriage. In addition, establishing training centers in the country for marriage counseling and promoting rigorous awareness can help address marital issues in society. Finally, organized religion can play a crucial role in strengthening marital bonds by providing effective premarital counseling and support for existing marriages.

5. Concluding Remarks and Policy Implications

This paper has examined the determinants of divorce in Tanzania by using data from Registration, Insolvency and Trustee Registration Agency. The underlying motivation for pursuing this study has largely been attributed to the increased rates of divorce that the country has witnessed during the recent past. We have used Bayesian negative binomial regression to estimate the determinants of divorce because this method is convenient for modeling non-negative and over-dispersed count data. Our empirical results have revealed that; conflict, cruelty, desertion, alcohol addiction, adultery, failure to consummate, financial difficulties,

misbehaving, communication problems, jealousy and insecurity, and lack of commitment have positive effects on divorce in Tanzania.

In terms of policy implications, this paper underscores the imperatives of establishing training centers in the country for marriage counseling and promotion of awareness as a panacea to address marital issues in the country. Along this line, continuing education to adolescents on how to manage long term marital relationships remains key. In the United Kingdom, for instance, sex and relationship education is compulsory for children aged eleven years and beyond in all schools. Indeed, training on married couples could involve topics like communication and negotiation skills, empathy and compromising. Finally, the role of religious leaders cannot be overemphasized. More so, religious institutions can play a pivotal role in strengthening marital bonds by providing effective premarital counseling and support for existing marriages.

Last but not least, evidence from the data set exhibits that when it comes to marriage dissolution, more women than men are lodging divorce petition in the Court of law. Clearly, the natural question that arises is: why women initiate divorce more often than men in Tanzania? We suggest that further research on divorce in Tanzania should attempt to address this pertinent question.

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