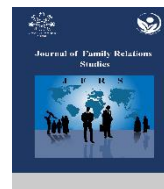




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## Research Paper

# Consequences and Challenges of Remarriage with an ex-spouse from the perspective of women and men: Grounded Theory



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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Remarriage to an ex-spouse is one of the most challenging decisions for any man or woman after divorce. It is associated with both positive and negative challenges and consequences. Therefore, this research aimed to identify the consequences and challenges of remarriage with an ex-spouse from the perspective of women and men in Yazd city.

**Methods:** The method of this research was qualitative with grounded theory study. The research populations were all men and women who had remarried with their ex-spouse. The research sample was selected using purposive and snowball sampling based on the inclusion and exclusion criterias. Semi-structured interview was conducted on them. hence, ten people (7 women and 3 men) were interviewed before theoretical saturation. The results were analyzed using MAXQDA software.

**Results:** After collecting and coding the data using the Strauss and Corbin method, which was based on open, axial, and selective coding, 292 concepts, 38 sub-categories, eight main categories, and one core category under the title "Family Reestablishment" were obtained. The main eight categories were Social Degradation, Mental Withdrawal, Urge to Remarry, Comprehensive Mediation, Gradual Restoration, Conscious Return, Psychological Hopelessness, and Return of Peace.

**Conclusion:** Results showed that when the family breaks up, various reasons and grounds make them to return to their former life. But in this way, they try to make a successful return with less challenges through changes in their behavior or in the family foundation.

## 1. Introduction

Divorce is one of the rather bitter occurrences of life that have affected many families. Evidence from the literature suggests an upward trend of divorce in recent years, such that the latest statistics and data from the country's registration and status organization reveal there were about 549,861 marriages and 174,590 divorces in 2018 (Zareei & Zarei, 2021). Although it

may free people from marital problems and conflicts, divorces may also lead to many challenges and complications for couples. Moreover, Research indicates that the consequences of divorce are more pronounced in women than men (Akhavan Tafti, 2003).

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Some people respond to the need to establish a relationship with the opposite sex through alternatives such as remarriage following the breaking of the marital bond (Dalilgoo, Vahida, Mohajerani, & Esmaeili, 2017), while some, especially women, are known to suffer from remorse-related anxiety following divorce. After separation, these people experience various feelings, such as loneliness, disappointment, victimhood, hatred, and regret (Asanjarani, Jazayeri, Fatehizade, Etemadi, & De Mol, 2017).

A distinct type of remarriage is remarrying an ex-spouse. Islamic jurisprudence refers to the notion of a divorced woman returning to a former marriage within the period of *Idah* (Sandilya & Shahnawaz, 2014). In such a marriage, one of the spouses or both of them feel regret for their perceived hastiness for some reason after the divorce and hence want to marry their ex-spouse again. The act of remarrying might be fueled by the pressure and insistence of the people around, the suggestion of one of the parties, or/and the agreement of both the man and woman. In general, it seems that the main reason behind remarriages is that the divorced couple face life-related complications or consequences such as feeling rejected, disappointed, and reprimanded by close people. low well-being, signs of helplessness, weaker self-concept (Hafarian, Aghaei, Kajbaf, & Kamkar, 2009) isolation, depression, the poor academic performance of children (Amato, 2014) and sexual needs as well as psychological and emotional needs that cause people to remarry their ex-spouse to alleviate these perceived complications. Nevertheless, different people may express other reasons for remarrying their ex-spouse after divorce based on their individual characteristics, living conditions, and the influence of the prevailing culture of their place of residence. According to the literature, other reasons for remarriage include the persistence of the couple's love and interest for each other (samari safe, zarei, Najarpourian, & Mohamadi, 2023; Fackrell, 2012; Sandilya & Shahnawaz, 2014) perceived status of children (Karupiah, 2020; Raley & Sweeney, 2020; Fackrell, 2012) and economic and financial issues (Fackrell, 2012). More often than not, people tend to remarry their ex-spouse for several reasons: (1) experience of personal growth that leads them back into the relationship, (2) forgiving or forgetting the wrongs their ex-spouse committed, (3) having a positive relationship with their ex-spouse's family (4) Realizing that single life is not satisfying and/or challenging (5) Realizing that they still love their ex-spouse (6) Realizing that they got divorced for the utmost of the wrong reasons (Pearce Plauche, Marks, & Hawkins,

2016). Finally, the evidence indicates that a high percentage of couples have the desire to return to their previous marriage after divorce (Ghujaei Khameneh, 2015).

The inclination to remarry an ex-spouse can be a highly stressful situation because most people have concerns about the recurrence of past complications, further fueled by being scolded by those around them. Although it is possible to live again with an ex-spouse, studies show that second (re)marriages often end faster than the first marriage, implying the challenges awaiting those who are seeking to revoke their divorce (Emdady, ZARGHAM, Mirzahoseini, & Monirpour, 2019). That is, in case the husband and wife fail to address the problems and challenges they have faced in their past before living together again, they are almost sure to arise again in a very short period of time, this time perhaps to greater heights. Continuing to live in such tense and restless conditions can have very serious psychological, emotional and physical consequences for all the parties involved. Furthermore, the divorce and the separation of the couple for a second time would have far greater reaching damage to the couple and their children. Nevertheless, if the couple is devoted to seriously scrutinizing their former differences before remarriage and strikes a formidable agreement on resolving them, a peaceful life with high quality, compatibility, and satisfaction can be on the horizon.

Therefore, the aim of this research was to theoretically examine the factors related to remarrying an ex-spouse and the consequences and challenges lying therein. Considering that most of the studies conducted in the field of marriage and remarriage have been carried out quantitatively and hence the need for a gaining deeper understanding of the views of couples regarding the consequences and challenges of remarriage, especially that with an ex-spouse, the current research employed a qualitative methodology for the aforementioned purposes. The significance of dealing with this issue in a practical sense is to find out the factor or set of factors that are pivotal to the predictive nature of remarriage with an ex-spouse or revoking divorce. As such, determining the consequences and challenges of remarrying an ex-spouse is of paramount importance given its mitigating capacity for reducing the rate of divorces in society, in the aftermath of which researchers will be able to help clients on the verge of divorce to have a more detailed and deeper look at their conflicts and problems, reflect on them and finally make a more appropriate decision for the future of their life together.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The method of This research was qualitative with grounded theory study. The research populations were all men and women who had remarried with their ex-spouse. the research sample was selected using purposive and snowball sampling based on the inclusion and exclusion criterias. The research inclusion criteria were: (1) The divorce being registered in the court; (2) re-marrying the ex-spouse during *Idah* (waiting period); and (3) having had revocable divorces. Furthermore, couples who have had a long-term quarrel and have been separated were excluded from the study. Due to the extreme specificity of the research subject and the difficulty of achieving the required sample, the authors numerously visited counseling centers, official documents organizations, marriage and divorce offices, and social assistance and prevention of crime in Yazd province to achieve their desired research sample using purposive snowballing sampling. The collection of data continued until the basic elements of the study reached theoretical saturation. That is, conducting the interviews were stopped once the researcher came to the conclusion that the response provided were semantically close to each other and there were no new concepts and categories therein . As such, after conducting ten interviews (7 women and 3 men) and coding and analyzing the data, theoretical saturation was achieved. In addition one supplementary interview was also conducted, the results of which were similar to the previous interviews.

Given the nature of the research, in-depth semi-structured interviews were employed to obtain accurately and reliable information. Some of the interview questions were: "Please explain fully and in detail the factors that made you decide to remarry." "What methods did you use to remarry your ex-spouse?" "Did your family approve of your decision to remarry your ex-spouse?" "What problems did you face in living again with your ex-spouse after remarriage?" "What were the positive and negative consequences of living again with your ex-spouse?" "Are you happy to live with your ex-spouse again?" If necessary, these

questions were followed by probing statements such as "Please give an example.", "Please elaborate" "What do you mean by this?" All interviews were audio recorded with permission from the participants and analyzed after implementation before the next interview. The time of the interviews varied between 20 and 50 minutes. Semantic associations and then the concepts related to them were extracted, and hence, the concepts were grouped into categories. The grounded theory employed in this research for the data analysis, as well as the presentation of the data-based theory, is derived from the data that was systematically collected and analyzed during the research procedure, through which 292 concepts, 38 sub-categories, 8 main categories, and one core category were obtained. In the following, we will discuss each of the main categories and explain them because lots of sub-categories numbers in each main category, providing explanations and examples for each would cause a large volume of the article, so just the main categories have been explained in summary form. Open coding is conceptualization at the first level of abstraction and requires data analysis in order to extracting a set of categories and their characteristics. In order to accurately classify concepts into categories, each concept should be labeled after separation, and the raw data should be collected by carefully examining the text of the interviews and notes. Axial coding is the process of relating categories to sub-categories and linking categories at the level of features and dimensions. This coding is called axial because coding is realized around the axis of a category. Selective coding means the data theorist of the foundation writes a theory of the relationships between the categories in the axial coding model (Avani & Zareei Mahmood Abadi, 2020).

## 3. Results

As shown in Table 1, the average age of the participants and their spouses were 46.5 and 51.4 years, respectively. Also, the average number of children was about 2.5. The average years of marital life among couples was 22.7 years. The following names are pseudonyms.

**Table 1. Demographic characteristics of research participants**

	Name	Age	Age of spouse	Duration of the first marriage	Duration of staying divorced	Duration of the remarriage	Education	Education of the spouse	Number of kids
1	Maryam	52	56	20 years	1 year	9 years	Diploma	Bachelor	1 girl and 1 boy
2	Zahra	53	74	7-8 years	4 months	11 years	Elementary school	Illiterate	4 boys
3	Mohammad	43	42	10 years	4 years	5-6 years	Illiterate	Bachelor	1 girl and 1 boy
4	Narges	63	61	3 years	5 years	35 years	Diploma	Diploma	3 boys and 2 girls
5	Somayeh	38	46	6.5 yers	1.5 years	6 years	Bachelor	Assosiate	1 boy and 1 girl
6	Mina	47	62	24 years	4 years	7 months	Diploma	Diploma	1 girl and 1 boy
7	Hamid	30	31	9 years	7 months	7 months	High school	high school	1 boy
8	Manijeh	43	47	20 years	3 months <i>Idah</i>	1 year and 8 months	Diploma	High school	2 children
9	Hamed	44	43	27-28 years	3 months <i>Idah</i>	3-4 years	Diploma	High school	1 girl and 2 boys
10	Leila	52	52	20 years	1 year	7 years	Master's	Master's	1 girl and 1 boy

**Table 2. Sub-categories, main categories and core category**

Sub-categories	Main categories	Core categories
The wave of emotional excitement, Hasty decision in divorce - Hurtful isolation - Feeling of worthlessness - Lack of safe haven - Returning again	Urge to Remarry	Family Reestablishment
Mediation of the close family - Mediation of children - Mediation of family - Mediation of important others	Comprehensive Mediation	
The intrusion of others - Delusional thoughts - Social decline - Frequent social feedback	Social Degradation	
Rejection of the main family - Disturbance in the main family - Pressure of the spouse to remarry - Demands of the children - Financial Risks - Negative motivations	Mental Withdrawal	
The intention of vengeance – sense of confusion – Coldness towards spouse – Recurrence of limitations	Psychological Hopelessness	
Realizing peace – Road to recovery – Peace of children – Return with esteem	Return of Peace	
Structural alteration of the family – Mental recovery – Behavioral maturity – Resorting to spirituality	Gradual Restoration	
Gradual adaptation – Troubleshooting previous complications – Profound changes of the spouse – Insistence of the spouse – Comprehensive self-awareness	Conscious Return	

### **1. Urge to Remarry**

The Urge to Remarry represents the internal (i.e., personal) factors and triggers that encourage a person to remarry his ex-spouse. The grounds for this category are the feelings that individuals suffer after separation from their spouses, such as the feeling of regret from the divorce and the persistence of love and affection between the couple. Such emotions lead to couples realizing how much they are attentive to each other and want to live together only after they have separated from each other. As a result, they decide to return to each other again. Participant No. 9 (44 years old, male) states in this regard: "It was very difficult; I was under a lot of pressure. To tell the truth, I liked her. I couldn't tolerate the grief of being away from her... I mean, from the first time we got married, which led to the divorce, then the remarriage, all was because I loved her, and I couldn't let her go; I couldn't see that she was with another man."

### **2. Comprehensive Mediation**

Mediation is one of the dispute resolution methods in which a third party, a mediator, helps the disputing parties to reach an agreement. When husband and wife argue with each other or are angry with each other in some way, they tend to cut off all lines of communication therebetween. This issue may bother the family and friends of both parties, and they want reconciliation and reestablishing communication between the couple. These people try to prevent the collapse of a family through various types of intermediations.

Participant No. 6 (47 years old, female) stated that "My own mother insisted that I should go back and live with him. She said that he is a good man, he is not malevolent, he is very good in that sense." Participant No. (30 years old, male) also said that "My parents were like firmly behind me. They talked to my wife and her family without telling me."

### **3. Social Degradation**

Social Degradation refers to social challenges and limitations that a person has faced or perceives to be facing after divorce. Some female participants implied in their interviews that a major problem they faced after separation was highly peculiar marriage proposals. That is, after separation, they usually receive marriage proposals from old men or men with inappropriate conditions (unemployed people, drug addicts, etc.). Participant No. 2 (50 years old, female) stated that "I was barely 40 years old at that time. When I went out, women would come up and say, 'my father-in-law's wife is dead. He is a good man. Will you marry him? He is 70-ish years old.' I also had young suitors who had children themselves. We lived

apart for about four months, and many people from all sorts of social classes proposed to me directly or indirectly; it was very frustrating."

### **4. Mental Withdrawal**

Mental withdrawal corresponds to a set of behaviors and attitudes in the family, which causes divorcees, especially women, to face feelings of being snubbed in the family environment, itself leading to the sense of being a burden, humiliation, and worthlessness. That is, the decision of these women to distance themselves from the environment is shaped by psychological pressure to meet the suppressed needs of the family. Participant No. 10 (52 years old) stated that "when I got separated, I was alone. I had no contact with any of my family members. They didn't seek me out, either. I only talked to my sister sometimes. One of my brothers, who had been trying hard since the beginning of the separation to reverse my decision started ignoring me altogether as if he didn't expect such a separation from me."

### **5. Gradual Restoration**

One of the concepts frequently discussed by the research sample was their efforts to mitigate the obstacles in the way of remarriage. As such, participants have made use of various solutions to patch up their relationship, such as early retirement for the well-being of the family, going to work or helping their spouse with living expenses, and spending more time with the family, which has caused positive changes in the family structure compared to before. Participant No. 11 (52 years old) said that "I signed up for early retirement to make my life better," while Participant No. 6 (47 years old) argued that "Now that I am back with my spouse, we are now both working, and I have become more able financially."

### **6. Conscious Return**

People employ different methods to give their hand in a remarriage with an ex-spouse. Those who have been able to improve their living conditions oftentimes argue that in order to alleviate the challenges in life, they should be able to mitigate the sources of tension in the relationship. Some participants have considered making themselves more compatible with the moods and attitudes of their spouse to pave the way for smooth life. Participant No. 2 (50 years old, female) argued that "My husband's manners are highly unique; for example, he may get sulky on the smallest of things, but I know how to convince him. I have come to realize that you have to pamper him some and scold him some." Participant No. 1 (52-year-old) stated, "for the sake of sustaining life, I agreed to marry him again without a dowry because he said that I will not give any, and I agreed."

### 7. Psychological Hopelessness

This category simply represents the negative consequences that one might struggle with in his current life and after remarriage. Many people, hoping to build a better life, decide to remarry and think that they can transform themselves or their spouse after remarriage, an ideal that is not always realized. Moreover, there have been cases in which novel problems have been built upon already maintained complications, befalling the person into a mental pit. Participant No. 7 (30 years old) further argued that "This lady manipulatively came on to get dowry again and to take the child away from me." Participant No. 8 (43 years old) said: "The second time I came back, the situation became so much more difficult for me... We were supposed to be at home apart from my sister-in-law, and my husband would go to work, but my husband went back to his addiction again and kept going to his sister's house"

### 8. Return of Peace

This category represents the positive consequences that a person has achieved in his/her current life and after remarriage. Some participants considered returning to their former life as a reason for their peace of mind and mental health because they would then get rid of depression and despair caused by loneliness, being judged by others and other problems imposed on divorced people by society and family, and they would have more freedom to roam in the society. In Iran, female divorcees are highly perceived as not being able to freely choose their clothing and transportation. The issue frequently cited by the participants is that the children report having higher levels of calmness after the parents reconcile.

Participant No. 6 (47 years old) stated that "I feel more relaxed now; I was very tense then back then, had to deal with a great deal of tension. Participant No. 9 (44 years old) also stated that "I have become much more hopeful in life. In my previous life, some marital things were only done the hard way. But they are now much smoother and more comfortable, and we have become much more amicable now."

### Conceptual and Paradigm Model

The results from applying grounded theory to research

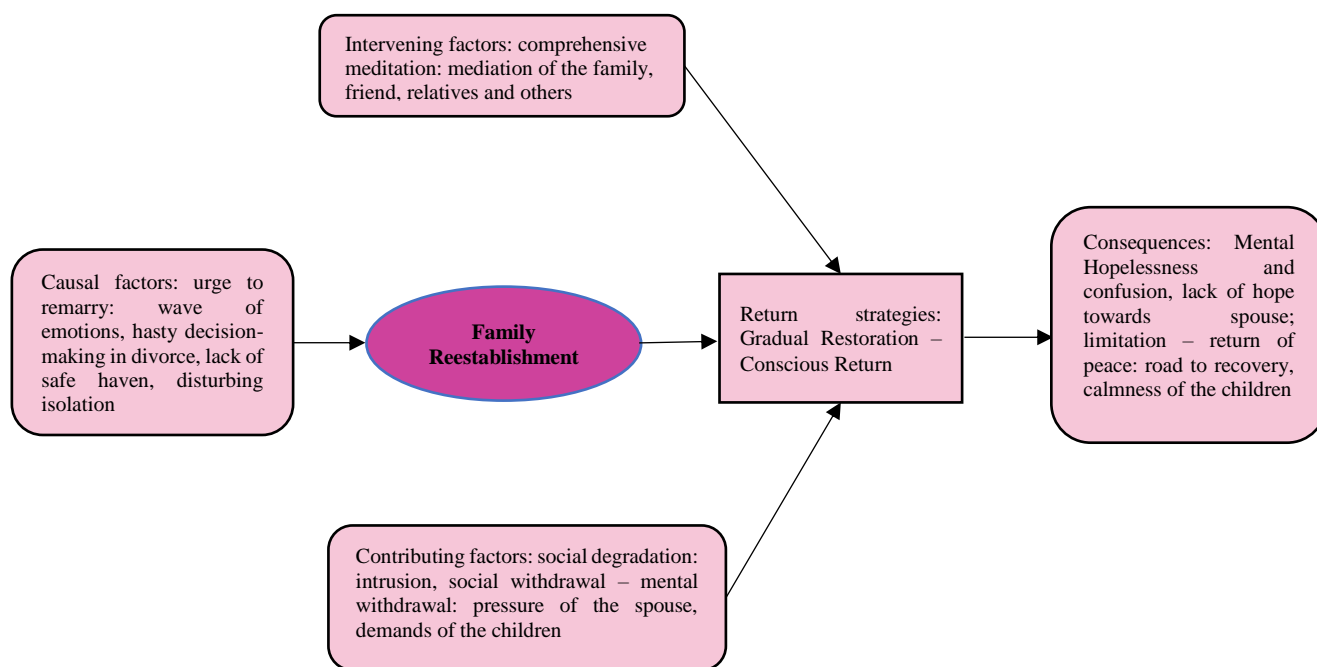
data indicated the following hypotheses:

1. Social degradation and isolation predict remarriage with an ex-spouse.
2. The wave of emotions affects the decision to remarry an ex-spouse.
3. Excessive fixation with children is correlated with remarriage with an ex-spouse.
4. Turmoil in the close family is related to the notion of remarriage with an ex-spouse.
5. Financial risks, especially for women, are related to the notion of remarriage with an ex-spouse.
6. The fundamental changes of the spouse perceivably lead to remarriage with an ex-spouse.

A paradigm model consisting of causal, intervening and contributing factors and also return strategies and consequences were specifically shown in Figure 1.

Causal factors are usually those events that affect the phenomena. These conditions are very important; Because one of the reasons for the research participants to return to live with their ex-wife is considered. The causal factor of the research was urge to remarry. Contributing factors are a special set of conditions that come together in a specific time and place to create situations or issues that people respond to with their actions/interactions. In fact, these conditions are the grounds and platforms that provide the means to refer to the ex-wife. The contributing factors of the research were mental withdrawal and social degradation. Intervening conditions were present outside of personal and contextual characteristics. That is, the background of society and the behavior of other people were involved in it. In this research, the comprehensive mediation including family, friends, etc. was recognized as an intervention factor; who have provided the conditions for the reconciliation of couples.

Eventually we used to refer to strategic tactics and normal or routine practices and how people manage situations when faced with issues and affairs. These tactics or normal behaviors are things that people, organizations and societies or nations do or they say. In this research, return strategies include gradual restoration and conscious return.



**Figure 1. Paradigm research model**

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

According to the theory derived from this research, the decision to remarry an ex-spouse is one that is not taken randomly, as it is based on alleviating an array of complications and meeting some needs of the couple, and it depends on the individual's attitude regarding the rewards and costs of returning to a former life and their corresponding perceived norms. If a person who failed in his former life is convinced that remarrying an ex-spouse would reduce problems and alleviate the perceived needs, he/she might simply proceed with the decision and do all in his/her power to make that happen, this time with a strong will to make things turn for the better.

Nevertheless, the first research question sought to inquire about the factors that lead to remarriage with an ex-spouse. One of the reasons for remarrying that most of the participants discussed during their interview was the perceived wave of emotions that they faced after the separation; emotions such as regret for the divorce, remaining affectionate towards the ex-spouse, and the guilt of the past mistakes. The most important reason that most people give for marrying their ex-spouse is that they were worried about the future of their children and their upbringing, as they didn't want their children to foster under the care of a stepfather or stepmother. Also, claiming to have been informed that the spouse has been behaviorally

transformed was another self-reported reason for the decision to remarry. The intervening factors that were perceived to facilitate remarriage included mediation by close family members, family elders, friends, and acquaintances. Also, the stigma of being divorced, social fear, becoming sexual prey, feelings of insecurity in daily life, desperation and helplessness, social exclusion, economic problems, and lack of social support are only a small portion of the experiences of divorced women in daily life. These experiences, in turn, play an important role in women's return to live with their ex-husbands. This finding was consistent with the findings of (Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 2019; samari safa et al., 2023; Limeira & Féres-Carneiro, 2019; Sandilya & Shahnawaz, 2014 & Fackrell, 2012).

The second research question pertained to the perspective of the participants towards the notion of remarriage and the experience they felt therein. In response, it should be said that there were two types of views on this notion. Those who were in favor of remarriage have been deemed as a second chance, yet they were some who were not satisfied with returning to their former life and expressed regret, calling it making the same mistake twice. This finding was consistent with the research findings of Mohammadi & Mohammadi (2019), Emdady et al. (2019) and Hu (2020).

The third research question was related to the reaction of others to remarriage, in that "how did others react to remarriage of one's ex-spouse?" The reaction of others (family and people close to the person) to remarriage has been twofold; either they have been supportive or unsupportive. Some people participating in the research stated that they were supported and encouraged by family, friends, and acquaintances when they decided to remarry, but some others said that when they talked about their decision to remarry, they faced strong family opposition and negative reactions from others, even to the point of being ridiculed by others. They considered the reason for these oppositions to be the family's fear of the recurrence of past problems and second divorce and hence were deprived of the support of family and friends. This finding was consistent with the research of Yekleh, Mohsenzade, & Zaharakar (2018), Afrasiabi & Khalaji Pirbalooti (2022) and Osmani, Matlabi, & Rezaei (2018).

The fourth research question corresponds to the strategic factors, that is, "what measures did men and women take to remarry?" The action strategies in this research were obtained in the form of two main categories, namely, Gradual Restoration and Conscious Return. The bitter experience of life after divorce creates a valuable opportunity for people to review their previous lives and discover the causes of their separation and differences. Most research participants have sought to uncover the roots of their past problems in different ways, such as through telephone communication or physical encounter with their ex-spouse. They also stated that they have contemplated their role in relation to their ex-spouse and found their share of faults and problems in the period after the separation, realizing that not all the faults and drawbacks are attributable to their spouse, and they themselves must shoulder a significant share of the faults, hence seeking to alleviate their problems by maintaining behavioral maturity. Some participants claimed to have worked on their spiritual and psychological reconstruction and believe that by recovering spiritually and going to self-discovery classes, they have been able to get rid of past grudges and obscurities and have been able to achieve peace of mind and gain the power to rebuild their lives. These findings were consistent with the research of Limeira & Féres-Carneiro (2019), samari safa et al. (2023), Sandilya & Shahnawaz (2014). The fifth research question pertained to the consequences, that is, "what are the consequences of remarriage of an ex-spouse?" In this research, the consequences include two main categories, namely Mental Hopelessness (negative

consequences) and Return to Peace (positive consequences). This implies that marrying an ex-spouse is a double-edged sword in that, if done correctly, it can have constructive results, otherwise leading to potentially extremely unfortunate consequences. Some of the positive consequences mentioned are achieving peace, more freedom in interactions, improving financial and economic conditions, being with children, and realizing the serenity of children, while the negative consequences include the recurrence of past problems, not forgetting the past mistakes of the spouse and feeling disgusted and hatred towards one another, confusion and self-censorship and sacrificing oneself for the satisfaction of the family, failing to correct the behavior and the attitude of the spouse and being subject to more restrictions by the spouse. These discovered negative consequences were consistent with the research results of Sandilya & Shahnawaz (2014) and Afrasiabi & Khalaji Pirbalooti (2022). The present research was plagued with a number of limitations owing to the equipment and abilities of the researchers. The most important limitation of this research was finding relevant research participants, as marrying an ex-spouse is a rare occurrence, and the number of couples who have made such a decision is very low. Some people were not willing to be interviewed because of their current living conditions and also because of their spouse's opposition. Also, there was not enough literature background, especially in the field of psychology, on re-marriage with an ex-spouse.

Considering the fact that the literature on the remarriage of an ex-spouse is still in its infancy, the interpretation and experience of these people should be examined and analyzed more quantitatively and qualitatively in prospective studies. Such research can perceptibly be of great contribution to psychologists and family counselors in the field of divorce and marriage and couple therapy, as they can provide a clear vision of challenges, positive and negative consequences, and solutions for a better and reasonable approach to couples who intend to remarry their ex-spouse. People who have children from their ex-spouse should prepare their children to embrace the upcoming hurdles of life before proceeding.

## 5. Ethical Considerations

### Compliance with ethical guidelines

In designing and compiling this research, ethical principles have been considered. The purpose of the research was explained to the participants and the information was received confidentially and used only for research purposes.



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### Authors' contributions

All authors of this article participated in all stages of writing and conducting research.

### Conflicts of interest

The authors of the article had no conflict of interest.

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