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Divorce  
in Gulf Cooperation  
Council Countries  
*Risks and Implications*



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Divorce rates in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)<sup>1</sup> countries have risen dramatically in recent years and continue to rise, with an adverse effect on children, families, and society as a whole. Divorced women, in particular, suffer considerable social and economic discrimination.*

*This rising divorce rate is caused by a range of economic, social, and cultural factors that have had a negative effect on the institution of marriage. Paradoxically, both the challenges of modernization and the traditional norms of arranged and early marriages play a role in the rising divorce rate. Individual GCC countries have taken various legal and social steps to halt the rising divorce statistics and to improve the position of divorced women. However, the lack of implementation of existing legislation that protects the rights of divorced women has been a significant social constraint. It is essential that governments give serious consideration to implementing international laws in conjunction with local regulations and monitoring them effectively and consistently—in particular, a codified personal status law. Governments could also promote information and counseling programs on divorce and the reciprocal rights and responsibilities of marriage.*

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## DIVORCE IS ON THE RISE IN GCC COUNTRIES

In recent decades, the countries of the GCC have experienced unprecedented social and economic upheavals that have introduced changes to the social fabric. Divorce, rare and deplored until recently, is now more and more common and increasingly tolerated.

There is an urgent need to understand why divorce is occurring much more frequently, often in the first years of marriage. Doing so will help policy-makers identify new patterns that may affect the future social development of GCC countries and find ways to slow the rising divorce rate. Although divorce appears to be a permanent feature of life everywhere in the 21st century, it is especially detrimental to Gulf societies, which pride themselves on maintaining strong family bonds and relationships. Given the high value that Arab societies place on family as the basic structure of civilization, they have a responsibility to

ensure that they seek to make divorce a last resort for couples in conflict.

There is also a need to understand the extent of divorce's repercussions so as to develop programs to deal with its harmful impact on all parties, especially on women and children. In circumstances in which divorce is unavoidable, GCC societies should make certain that children are protected from its deleterious impact, and that both men and women are treated fairly, receiving the rights they are guaranteed under Islamic law (Shari'a), national laws, and international conventions.

*Divorce is defined as a “final legal dissolution of marriage, that is, that separation of husband and wife which confers on the parties the right to remarriage under civil, religious and/or other provisions ... according to the laws of each country.”*

— United Nations, Principles and Recommendations for Vital Statistics Systems, 2001

# DIVORCE BY THE NUMBERS

Although they don't reach the high rates registered in some developed countries, divorce rates in the Arab region in general have been climbing. Over the past 20 years, GCC countries have witnessed rising divorce rates, and there are no signs of the pace slowing down (see Exhibits 1 and 2).

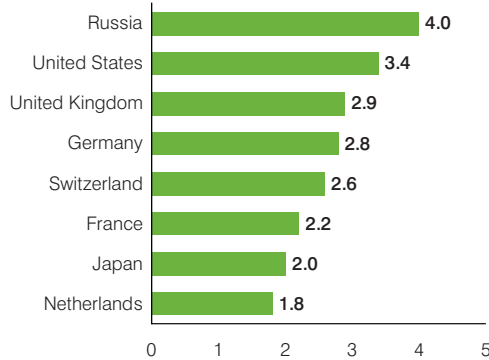
The GCC region's highest total divorce rate, among the overall population, is in Kuwait, at 37.13 percent of marriages; the lowest is 20 percent, in Saudi Arabia.

Divorce rates as a percentage of marriages among GCC nationals

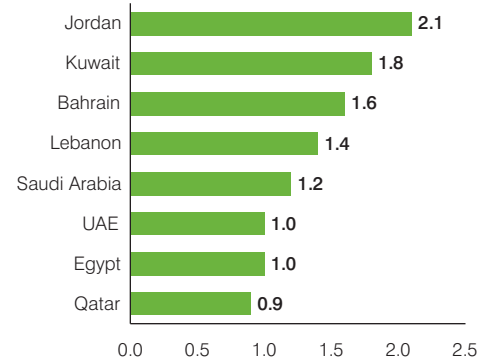
**Exhibit 1**  
*Divorce Rates Are High Worldwide*

**HIGHEST DIVORCE RATES IN SELECTED COUNTRIES (PER 1,000 POPULATION; 2007 OR LATEST AVAILABLE YEAR)**

**Developed Countries Worldwide**



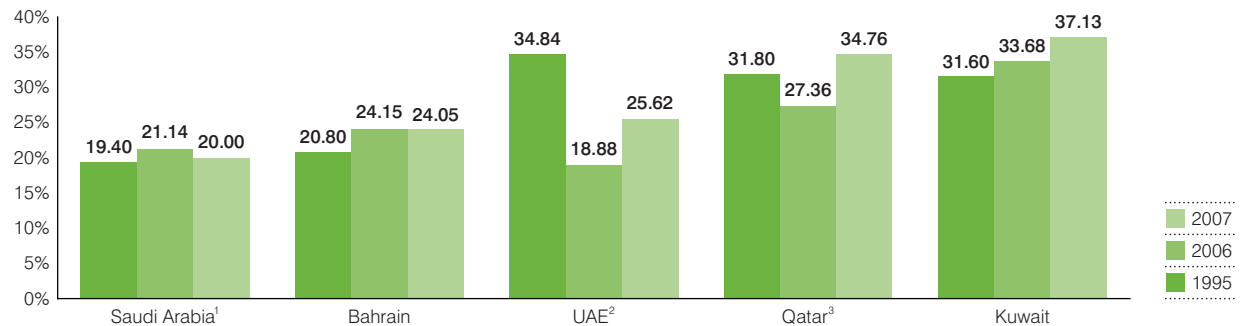
**Developing Countries in the Arab Region**



Source: United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), *Bulletin on Population and Vital Statistics in the ESCWA Region*; 12th Issue, New York, 2009, Table 68; The Economist, *Pocket World in Figures*, 2010 edition, p. 89.

**Exhibit 2**  
*Total Divorce Rates Are Rising in GCC Countries*

**TOTAL DIVORCE RATES AS A PERCENTAGE OF MARRIAGES IN GULF COUNTRIES (1995, 2006, 2007)**



<sup>1</sup> 1993, 2006, and 2008 data.

<sup>2</sup> 2008 data.

<sup>3</sup> 2009 data.

Source: United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), *Bulletin on Population and Vital Statistics in the ESCWA Region*, 12th Issue, New York, 2009, Tables 65 and 67; Qatar Statistics Authority, 2009; Statistics Authority, Ministry of Justice, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, *Statistics Book No 33 (1429 H) 2008*.

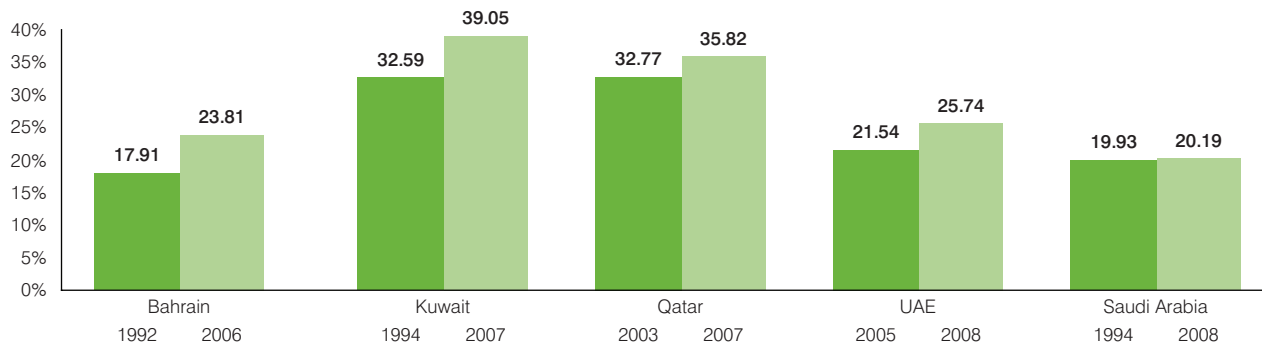
have followed the overall upward trend, reaching 39 percent in Kuwait (2007), 35.82 percent in Qatar (2007), 25.74 percent in the UAE (2008), 23.81 percent in Bahrain (2006), and 20.19 percent in Saudi Arabia (2008). The number of divorce cases has also increased steadily—in Kuwait, by 60.82 percent

over 13 years, from 1994 to 2007; in Qatar, by 24 percent over four years, from 2003 to 2007, in the UAE, by 42.19 percent over three years, from 2005 to 2008; in Bahrain, by 119 percent over 14 years, from 1992 to 2006; and in Saudi Arabia, by 116.55 percent over 14 years, from 1994 to 2008 (see Exhibit 3).

Data for 2006 from Bahrain and Kuwait shows that divorce rates are almost equal to marriage rates within the age group 20–29. Divorce rates then reach a ceiling among people aged 30–39. These findings suggest that young couples not only marry early but also divorce often and soon after marrying (see Exhibit 4).

**Exhibit 3**  
*Divorce Rates Are Rising Among GCC Nationals*

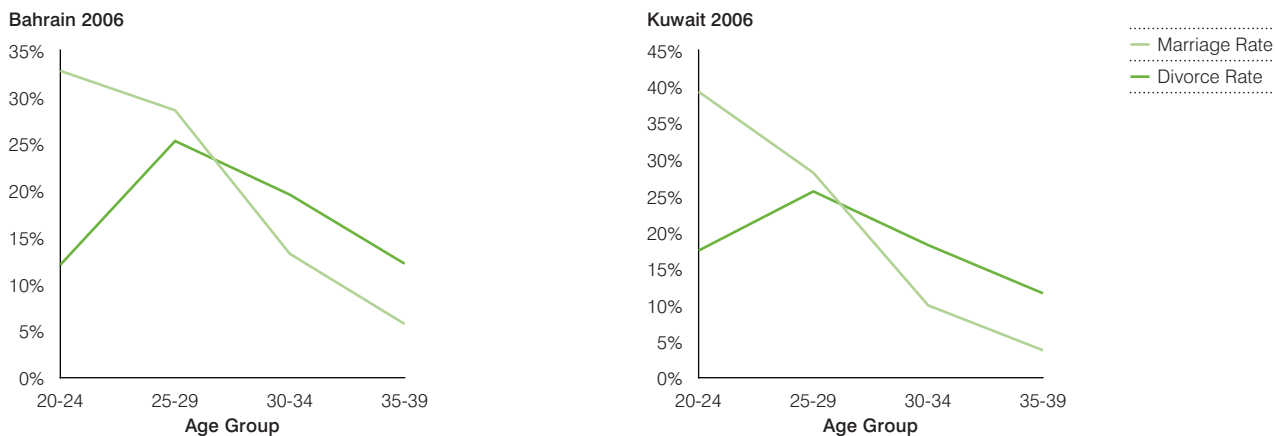
**DIVORCE RATES AS A PERCENTAGE OF MARRIAGES AMONG GCC NATIONALS (1992–2008)**



Note: Data for Oman was not available.  
Source: Bahrain: Central Informatics Organization, Kingdom of Bahrain, Tables 3.36 and 3.38 (1982–2006). Kuwait: Ministry of Planning, Statistics & Census Sector, State of Kuwait, *Annual Bulletin for Vital Statistics: Marriage & Divorce 2006*, p. 62, Table 1. Qatar: Statistics Authority, Qatar 2008, Table 68 (2003–2007). UAE: Ministry of Justice, Department of Justice, Abu Dhabi; Dubai Courts Department; Courts of Ras Al-Khaima Statistics (2005–2008), Table 2/32 (rate calculated on estimate of total population). Saudi Arabia: Statistics Authority, Ministry of Justice, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Statistics Books No. 26 (1422 H) and No. 33 (1429 H), 2008 (rate for 1994 calculated on estimate of total population).

**Exhibit 4**  
*Young People Are Divorcing Early in Their Marriages*

**BAHRAIN AND KUWAIT DIVORCE AND MARRIAGE RATES AMONG NATIONALS AS A PERCENTAGE OF AGE GROUPS**



Source: Bahrain: Central Informatics Organization, Kingdom of Bahrain, Table 3.40 (2006). Kuwait: Ministry of Planning, Statistics & Census Sector, State of Kuwait, *Annual Bulletin for Vital Statistics: Marriage & Divorce 2006*, p. 85, Table 13, and p. 33, Table 9.

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## DIVORCE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Although the data on divorce rates is straightforward, information is lacking about the impact of the growing incidence of divorce. Public discussion of divorce, particularly in the media, is gaining momentum in the six GCC countries. Health professionals are paying more attention to ways that divorce may hurt women and children. Still, there is a need for more independent and comprehensive studies by qualified researchers on the causes and consequences of divorce. Until that research is forthcoming, those concerned about rising divorce rates must depend largely on informal observations.

In Gulf countries, the family is the basic cohesive social unit. Its importance resides in the fact that it is the principal social institution through which members inherit their social

and cultural identities, as well as receive economic security and social support. All members cooperate to ensure the family's continuation through commitments based on interdependence and reciprocity. Today, all available evidence indicates that divorce is a factor in a variety of emerging social problems negatively affecting the sanctity of the family and the well-being of its members. The end of a marriage is disruptive to family members, and its adverse effects fall especially hard on children and women.

It is important, however, to distinguish between the impact of divorce itself—on individuals, families, and society—and the impact of the laws and customs surrounding divorce in the GCC.

### Impact of Divorce

The family is children's first school, and parents are expected to raise their children in a way that provides them with a strong foundation. According to several studies conducted in the GCC region, parental conflict and divorce have a damaging impact

on children's emotional and mental development, sometimes leading to behavioral disorders, depression, poor school performance, drug addiction, and even criminal behavior.

In Kuwait, according to a Ministry of Planning report cited in a *Kuwait Times* article, 60 percent of children of divorced parents suffer from psychological problems and display aggressive behavior.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Saleh Ibrahim Al Sanie, professor of psychology at Al Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University in Riyadh, studied the impact of "family disintegration" and hostile home environments, which often accompany divorce, on children and youths. His research found that the unstable family situations that are present during a divorce, including parental distress, discouragement, hopelessness, and other psychological problems, made children and youths more prone to delinquency, deviance, and addiction to alcohol and drugs.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, Sheikha Alanoud bint Thamer bin Mohammad Al Thani, a

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member and researcher at the Qatar Supreme Council for Family Affairs, found that children from families fragmented by divorce suffer more than others from a lack of affection and well-being and have a higher incidence of delinquency.<sup>4</sup>

These studies are backed up by the experiences of practitioners who deal with family problems. “Divorce affects negatively the behavior and health of children,” said one Saudi female clinical psychologist in Dhahran. “They may become aggressive, hyperactive, anxious; [they may]

have sleep disturbances and no appetite. They may also develop psychosomatic diseases and cannot perform well at school. They may also take refuge in drugs and crime. When they reach my clinic, a number of them are depressed and silent, and they look sick and helpless. They also feel guilty that they may be the reason for the parents’ divorce. Children get confused and receive different messages from their divorcing parents which may be contradictory.”

Therefore, it is wise social policy to try as much as possible to shield chil-

dren and youth from the potentially harmful effects of divorce in order to avoid future societal problems.

#### **Impact of Laws and Customs Surrounding Divorce**

Divorce may be liberating, even lifesaving, for women caught in physically or emotionally abusive relationships. But for many others, it is a traumatic experience with difficult repercussions in many aspects of life due to the regional customs surrounding divorce. Traditional family laws in Gulf societies recognize that authority is held by the most senior

*“Many divorced women cannot cope with the divorce situation. They have anxiety ... with feelings of hopelessness and helplessness.”*

— Saudi female clinical psychologist in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

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male family member—the father, husband, or brother. They have power and decision-making authority over female family members. As a result, women may be vulnerable to discrimination in family matters and may become at a disadvantage in the family laws—also known as personal status laws—governing such matters as marriage and divorce.

Some divorced women suffer physical and psychological abuse at the hands of ex-husbands who refuse to pay alimony or to allow their wives custody of their children. Others may face social and economic discrimination. “A woman who makes the decision to divorce in our country feels psychologically punished,” said the Saudi clinical psychologist in Dhahran. “She has to go against the whole social system—the family, the parents, the husband, the traditions.

She has to fight and to struggle to keep her children as well as her legal rights.” These problems particularly affect women in lower income classes. Ill-equipped to enter the labor market, they cannot support themselves financially or protect themselves against an ex-husband’s abuse. And those who do find jobs often suffer from the social stigma of being a single mother. As one Saudi divorcee related, although she receives some sympathy, for the most part: “I suffer a lot from people who look down on me because I have to work and I am divorced.”

Anwa’ar, a 25-year-old Saudi woman, whose divorce is still pending in court, related her story: “I have a daughter 4 years old. [My husband] refuses to give me back my rights as a mother—that is, alimony for my daughter. Now I work in a ladies’ center in Riyadh as

a waitress every day from 9 A.M. to 5 P.M., and I earn 2,500 SR [Saudi riyal] a month. I live with my mother at home. I approached a women’s NGO in Riyadh and they helped me find this job.... However, I hope to get good training in something else and get a better job.”

Divorce creates such problems in many parts of the world. But in Gulf societies, the negative repercussions of divorce for women are often exacerbated by prevailing cultural biases, restrictions, and customs. For example, a husband is allowed to divorce his wife simply by pronouncing the *Talaq*, or divorce words.

In accordance with Shari’a guidelines, family laws stipulate that women have the right to seek divorce from the court on grounds of hurt and other specific conditions, or by

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practicing *Khal'a*, a Shari'a practice that permits women to obtain a divorce unilaterally. However, they must give up their right to financial support and return the *mahr*, or dowry.

Divorced women may also experience difficulty in getting their custodial rights. Many women thus face the dilemma of either staying in an unhappy marriage in order to continue living with their children, or abandoning them in order to escape marital discord or abuse.

Securing their financial rights in divorce can also be a challenge for many women. Although family laws do contain legal rights and protections for women during divorce, these are not fully implemented by courts, because the patriarchal norms and traditions of the Gulf's societies often transcend rules and regulations. Divorce, like other personal status matters, is largely handled by male judges: There are no

female judges in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, or Oman, although Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates recently appointed women as judges.

Saudi journalist and women's rights activist Haifa'a Khalid founded the Saudi Divorce Initiative in March 2008 to examine the difficult situation of Saudi divorced women and bring public attention to their problem. In March 2010, she launched the E-Society for Divorce,<sup>5</sup> a nonprofit Saudi association that provides direct help to divorced women. "All the rights of divorced women exist in our Shari'a but we lack a codified system that regulates these laws," she said. "Women's ignorance of their rights in the Shari'a is the reason they are unable to get their complete rights. The major problem is in education, the schoolbooks, the media, and the style adopted by some of the religious men, where the focus is

only on marriage, marital duties, and responsibilities, without any reference to the rights of women—including those of divorce, which are part of the Shari'a."

Despite the fact that all six GCC countries have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), women still face legal inequalities in divorce-related proceedings under the personal status laws (see "*The State of the Law*").

If divorce is taking a heavy toll on women, who make up half the population of the Gulf countries and who are the ones mainly responsible for passing on attitudes and values to the next generation, it would be advisable for policymakers to ensure that divorce, if unavoidable, is a just and equitable experience for both sides.

## The State of the Law

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly and is often described as an international bill of rights for women. It defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. The Convention provides the basis for realizing equality between men and women and seeks to ensure equal rights for women in political, economic, social, cultural, and family life. Countries that have ratified or acceded to the convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice and are committed to submit national reports on measures taken to comply with their treaty obligations.

### Exhibit A

#### GCC Countries' Status of Ratification of the UN-CEDAW and Country Codification of Personal Status Law

| COUNTRY              | DOES THE COUNTRY CONSTITUTION RECOGNIZE GENDER EQUALITY?   | DATE OF RATIFICATION AND ACCESSION TO UN-CEDAW | DOES THE COUNTRY HAVE RESERVATIONS ON ARTICLE 16?*(MARRIAGE-DIVORCE & FAMILY RELATIONS) | DO WOMEN HAVE THE RIGHT TO GET A DIVORCE FROM THE COURT? | DOES THE COUNTRY HAVE A NEW CODIFIED PERSONAL STATUS LAW? DATE |
|----------------------|--|--|---|--|--|
| Bahrain              | Yes, but it does not include direct laws to ban gender discrimination  | June 2002                                      | Yes, paragraph 1 due to conflict with Shari'a   | Yes  | Yes, 2009 (only Sunni courts)                                  |
| Kuwait               | Yes, but it does not include direct laws to ban gender discrimination  | September 1994                                 | Yes, paragraph 1 (ibid)   | Yes  | Yes, 1984  |
| Oman                 | Yes. Articles 12 & 17 of Basic Omani law, but gender discrimination still exists due to lack of law enforcement      | February 2006                                  | Yes, paragraph 1 (ibid)   | Yes  | Yes, 1997  |
| Qatar                | Yes. Articles 34 & 35 in Qatar's Constitution, but gender discrimination still exists due to lack of law enforcement | April 2009                                     | No reservation  | Yes  | Yes, 2006 (Family Law)   |
| Saudi Arabia         | Yes. Article 47 of Basic Law of Saudi Government, but no direct laws to ban gender discrimination                    | September 2000                                 | Yes, paragraph 1 (ibid)   | Yes  | No   |
| United Arab Emirates | Yes. Articles 25–35 of UAE Labor Law but no direct laws to ban gender discrimination                                 | October 2004                                   | Yes, paragraph 1 (ibid)   | Yes  | Yes, 2005  |

\*Article 16, Paragraph 1 of CEDAW reads:

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:

- (a) The same right to enter into marriage;
- (b) The same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent;
- (c) The same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution;
- (d) The same rights and responsibilities as parents, irrespective of their marital status, in matters relating to their children; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;
- (e) The same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights;
- (f) The same rights and responsibilities with regard to guardianship, wardship, trusteeship and adoption of children, or similar institutions where these concepts exist in national legislation; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;
- (g) The same personal rights as husband and wife, including the right to choose a family name, a profession and an occupation;
- (h) The same rights for both spouses in respect of the ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment and disposition of property, whether free of charge or for a valuable consideration.

Source: United Nations, "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women," Division for the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York, 2010. UNDP-POGAR (United Nations Development Programme—Programme on Governance in the Arab Region), 2010. Country Themes: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates. The World Bank, "Middle East & North Africa, Gender Overview," Washington, D.C., 2007, page 23, table 4. United Nations, "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and Its Optional Protocol: Handbook for Parliamentarians," New York, 2003, Article 16, page 98.

## WHY DIVORCE RATES ARE RISING IN GCC COUNTRIES

Paradoxically, the causes of accelerating divorce rates lie in two seemingly divergent forces: modernization and tradition. Available evidence suggests that modernization, including urbanization, could be subverting some of the traditional values and practices that once held families together, and imposing new demands on married couples. At the same time, some long-held traditions and social practices associated with marriage and family life may be undermining successful marriages in the Gulf's modernizing environment.

This is not a surprise. If there is one aspect of the Gulf region that cannot be ignored or denied, it is that it is a region in transition. Competitive cross-currents are to be expected. And this is apparent when we look at the reasons for the growing number of divorces in these societies. Gulf families themselves are in transition, often experiencing an imbalance in how they negotiate the demands, aspirations, and expectations that arise from modernization and that go

beyond traditional norms prevailing just a generation ago.

One way to think about this shift is in terms of the "J-curve" as it applies to stability and openness in societies. If one measures the openness of a society on the x-axis of a graph and its stability on the y-axis, it is clear that less-open societies are relatively stable (with, of course, accompanying trade-offs). As societies become more open, they temporarily become less stable, causing a dip on the graph; however, as they progress along the path toward maturity and complete openness, stability increases to a point even higher than it was before—creating a curve in the shape of the letter J.<sup>6</sup> When it comes to divorce, one might think of the GCC countries as being at the low point in the curve: These societies are experiencing the initial dip in stability that accompanies new developments such as greater education and employment among women. As new generations are raised to expect that women will have the right to education and work opportunities, then individuals and policymakers alike will become more accustomed to changes in social and family structures, stability will increase, and (it's logical to expect) the rise in the divorce rate will subside.

**New Era, New Roles, New Problems**  
The roots of this historic period of transition go back as far as 78 years

ago to the first discovery of oil in the Gulf. The subsequent accumulation of vast wealth, incipient industrialization, accelerated transition from a nomadic to a sedentary and urbanized existence, infrastructure development, the expansion of education for both boys and girls, and more recently, the appearance of satellite television and the Internet, have all contributed to a major transformation of the region that is affecting both societal and personal norms of behavior. Exposure to new ideas and lifestyles from foreign cultures, particularly those in the West and in Asia, has sparked major changes in the expectations of Gulf residents, including what they expect from marriage.

The impact of these forces has been particularly evident in the last 30 years as increasing numbers of families have moved to a more urbanized way of life, bringing change to their traditional functions, structure, and cultural attitudes.

Modernization has, in many cases, meant a weakening of the expanded family structure as more married couples live on their own, separate from their in-laws. In the process, traditional family attitudes that reinforced respect for the sanctity and bonds of marriage, and stressed sacrifice for the multi-member family unit, have been more or less weakened. In addition, modernization has given

women new options, which also has diluted traditional sentiments toward marriage as a permanent, unalterable situation. Today, many women are as educated as their husbands and hold full-time jobs. As a result, they have greater social, financial, and psychological independence. This and the necessities of urban living have provoked changing gender roles in the marital home. Ultimately, these shifts may promote stronger and more cohesive families. But during this period of transition, many families are challenged by the adjustment.

Many husbands and wives have different relationships than their parents did, requiring new types of communication skills that acknowledge equality rather than authority. The modern trend for married couples is for both partners to participate in internal family affairs and economic family affairs, decision making, and child care. Women in GCC countries are participating wholeheartedly in this trend, gaining more autonomy and economic independence. In her article “Women’s Socioeconomic Characteristics and Marital Patterns in a Rapidly Developing Muslim Society, Kuwait,” Nasra M. Shah describes how “Two developmental factors, women’s education and their

work participation, are emerging as especially critical catalysts for bringing about changes in other aspects of women’s life and behavior, including their marital patterns.” Taking Kuwait as an example of “an oil-rich Arab Muslim country [that] has undergone fairly rapid socioeconomic development during the last few decades,” she explains that Kuwaiti society has been transformed in many ways because of these two factors.<sup>7</sup>

Economically, modernization has brought new demands, appetites, and stresses—all of which are being cited as contributing factors to the rising incidence of divorce. In the UAE, for example, media reports indicate that rising prices and rents, as well as the desire of some couples for luxurious lifestyles, have led to heavy debt—triggering numerous family disputes and in some cases even divorce.<sup>8</sup> Similar financial pressures have been noted by media outlets as a source of marital disputes and climbing divorce rates in Qatar.<sup>9</sup> In Kuwait, parliament member Mubarak Al-Waalan requested that the government permit Kuwaitis who work in the public sector to take a second job in the private sector as a way to cope with the high cost of living. He stated that more than

2,000 Kuwaiti couples had divorced as a result of financial problems.<sup>10</sup> In Saudi Arabia, news outlets have reported that financial problems have also triggered disagreements and disputes leading to divorce among young couples, especially when they are providing extra financial support to the parents of either husband or wife.<sup>11</sup>

“Divorce is rising with the influx of money and the sudden exposure of our society to the Western world, shifting from a closed society to a more open one,” observed Haifa’a Khalid. “Unfortunately, we are taking the wrong values from the West. Selfishness is a big problem as people think more about themselves and are not ready to sacrifice.”

Some analysts, such as Khalid, contend that the materialism and consumerism that are by-products of modern, oil-rich societies are crowding out traditional attitudes that valued relationships over possessions. In the process, the analysts argue, they are contributing to troubled marriages that end up in divorce. For some young couples, social status is defined by multiple cars, showy houses, designer clothing, and many domestic servants—luxuries obtained only by

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going into debt and ultimately into the type of discord that sometimes results in divorce.

#### **Traditional Issues in a Modern World**

Alongside modernization's potential challenges to marital harmony, some traditional values and practices that are still widespread in the Gulf's patriarchal societies may also be contributing to the rise in divorce as they come into conflict with new societal roles.

For one, some segments of young people are still not able to choose their partners freely. In these cases, the family, and especially the father, remains to an extent the authority in determining the marital choice of sons, and even more so of daughters. This could make the selection of a marriage partner in some ways a social proposition favoring family interests at the expense of individual rights. Where local traditions remain strong, some marriages occur within the framework of kinship affiliations arranged by parents, brothers, other relatives, and friends.

In addition to arranged marriages, there are social influences on young people to marry young, at least by their early 20s. Such pressures are most intense on young women, many

of whom are raised to believe that their most cherished dream should be to have a husband and children.<sup>12</sup>

“Our society is partly responsible for the high divorce rates as a lot of couples marry quickly without any chance to know each other, so in reality they are like strangers and there is no communication between them,” said a Saudi female clinical psychologist in Dhahran.

In addition, young people have limited opportunities to become acquainted before marriage, which may lead to miscommunications after they are married. In conservative societies, where segregation is the rule and dating is to a large extent not allowed, couples may not go out before marriage, and some see their spouses for the first time only at the wedding.<sup>13</sup>

Many boys and girls may lack the communication skills they need to interact with the opposite sex, because their upbringing and schooling have in most instances been strictly gender segregated. However, some universities in the GCC, public as well as private, are starting to implement desegregated environments; this allows possibilities for young men and women to learn the communication skills with the

opposite sex that may serve them well in married life.

Other social traditions may be contributing to the high failure rate of marriages, according to anecdotal evidence that comes up in conversations at family and social gatherings and in interviews with mental health care professionals.

One issue is family interference by in-laws in a married couple's affairs. Another is the tendency to raise children to be overly dependent on families to repair a difficult situation, rather than to take individual responsibility for fixing it themselves. This tendency could lead to immaturity in adulthood, and a lack of personal initiative to resolve problems. This immaturity is then reflected in a refusal to accept the responsibilities of marriage, which is not taken seriously as a life commitment but is considered more as an experience that might or might not work out. Often, young couples do not know the meaning of compromise and see divorce as the first answer when things go wrong, rather than as a last resort after all other channels have been exhausted.

*“Many people have been taking the marriage commitment lightly and realized at a later stage the responsibilities and duties it entailed.”*

— Badr Al Zamanan, Kuwaiti Justice Ministry Undersecretary for Legal Affairs.<sup>14</sup>

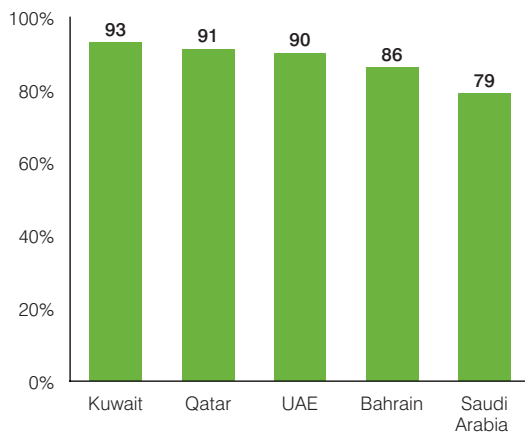
## WOMEN'S CHANGING ECONOMIC ROLES

Female education and women's expanding presence in the region's workforce are among the greatest catalysts of change in Gulf societies, as female literacy levels and enrollment in secondary schools skyrocket (*see Exhibit 5*).

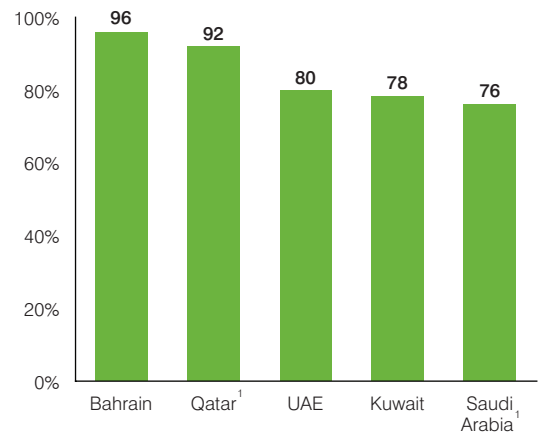
The precise effect of women's education and expanding employment on marital behavior and divorce is still not well documented because of the paucity of data in the GCC countries. But observation strongly suggests that these two developments are funda-

**Exhibit 5**  
*Female Education Is Widespread in GCC Countries*

**FEMALE ADULT (15+) LITERACY IN SELECTED GCC COUNTRIES (2007)**



**FEMALE NET ENROLLMENT RATIO IN SECONDARY EDUCATION (2006)**



<sup>1</sup> 2007 data.

Source: United Nations Statistics Division: <http://unstats.un.org>, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, National Literacy Rates for Youth and Adults (15+), and Institute for Statistics. Table 5: Enrollment Ratios by ISCED Level, [www.uis.unesco.org](http://www.uis.unesco.org), June 2009, UNESCO Institute for Statistics: Education in Saudi Arabia, 2007, <http://stats.uis.unesco.org>

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mentally transforming marriage and do have a role in a couple's decision to divorce or not. As a result of their advanced education and labor market participation, many women today have a mobility they did not have in the past. They can also be more

assertive and have higher expectations of what they want and what they deserve in a long-term relationship like marriage.

What is available in the way of research points to some developments

that indicate upheaval as individuals adjust to shifts in their traditional roles. In Kuwait, for example, official 2007 data indicates a direct correlation between an increase in divorce rates and the level of the wife's educational status, with no similar effect

*“I have been divorced for 13 years.... My daughter is 13 years old.... Now I work because I want to be financially independent. I earn 3,500 SR per month. I want to prove to myself that I can take full responsibility for my daughter and our house.”*

— Uum Arij, 38, one daughter, head of a woman's section in a Riyadh company

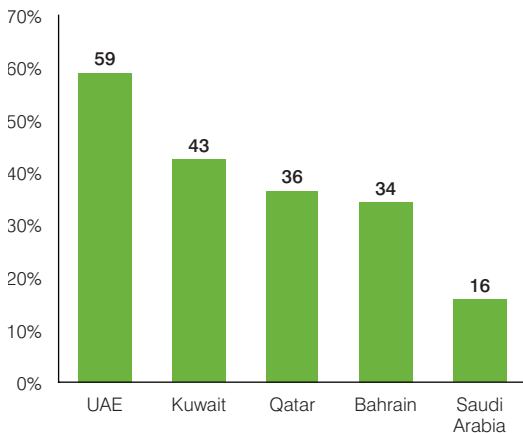
shown from the level of the husband's education. When the husband holds a university degree, the divorce rate increases from 1 percent if the wife has only primary education, to 10 percent if the wife has an intermedi-

ate education, to 18 percent if the wife has a secondary education, to 23 percent if she has a post-secondary certification. It then reaches its peak of 47 percent when both husband and wife have university degrees.<sup>15</sup>

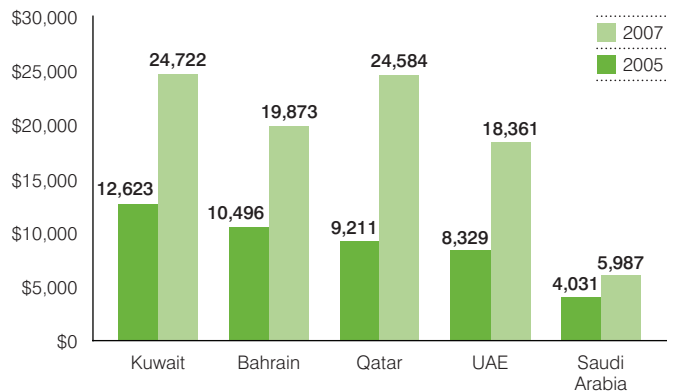
As a result of women's education, the participation of national females in the Gulf region workforce is increasing, with corresponding increases in their earned income (see Exhibit 6).

**Exhibit 6**  
**More Women Are Participating in the Labor Market and Earning High Incomes in GCC Countries**

**NATIONAL FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOR FORCE—GCC COUNTRIES (2008)**



**ESTIMATED FEMALE EARNED INCOME—PURCHASING POWER PARITY IN US\$ (2005, 2007)**



Source: UAE Ministry of State for Federal National Council Affairs—United Arab Emirates, *Women in the UAE: A Portrait of Progress, 2008*. Kuwait, Ministry of Statistics, 2008. Qatar, Statistics Authority, *Labor Force Survey, 2008*. Bahrain, Labor Market Regulatory Authority, *Labor Force Survey, 2008*. Central Department of Statistics and Information, Ministry of Economy and Planning, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA), *Forty-Fifth Annual Report, 2009*, p. 229. United Nations Development Programme, *Arab Human Development Report, 2009*, p. 259, Table 25; p. 181, Table J.

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As a result of women's growing employment, two different, even contradictory, social trends are affecting marriage and divorce rates. On the one hand, a working woman becomes financially independent, which increases her power vis-à-vis her husband, whose role as sole

provider for the family is weakened. Her new status gives her greater independence and a desire to share in family decision making. It also allows her more freedom for making personal decisions. As a result, a power struggle may develop between the marriage partners. On the other hand,

these changing social circumstances should be destabilizing factors only in the short term, as individuals and families adjust to women's new roles; ultimately, a better sense of equality between partners should lead to stronger marriages and a reduced rate of divorce.

*“Education develops the mind of a woman and allows her to decide what type of man she wants to choose and what type of life she wants to live.”*

— Professor of Social Studies at King Saud University, Riyadh

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Indeed, in some ways this move to greater stability may already be under way. The economic demands of modern life mean that more men are looking to marry working women who will contribute to the family

income. In Kuwait, official 2007 data shows that only 46 percent of divorce declarations occur between Kuwaiti couples who both hold a job; this percentage increases to 54 percent when the husband works and

the wife is jobless.<sup>16</sup> In Saudi Arabia, research shows that most men prefer a wife who works, especially if she holds a secure job as a teacher or in the government.<sup>17</sup>

*“When a wife works and earns money she feels that she is independent financially from her husband and holds a stronger position in marriage.... At the same time the husband feels threatened that he is no longer in control, and that is a reason to break a marriage.”*

— Emirati businesswoman from Dubai

## High Rates of Divorce: Not Just Urban Areas

Initial research into divorce statistics has uncovered an unusual pattern in at least two Gulf states that deserves further study: Namely, that high rates of divorce are occurring among strongly traditional, semirural segments of the population whose lifestyles remain relatively less affected by modernization than those of their urban compatriots.

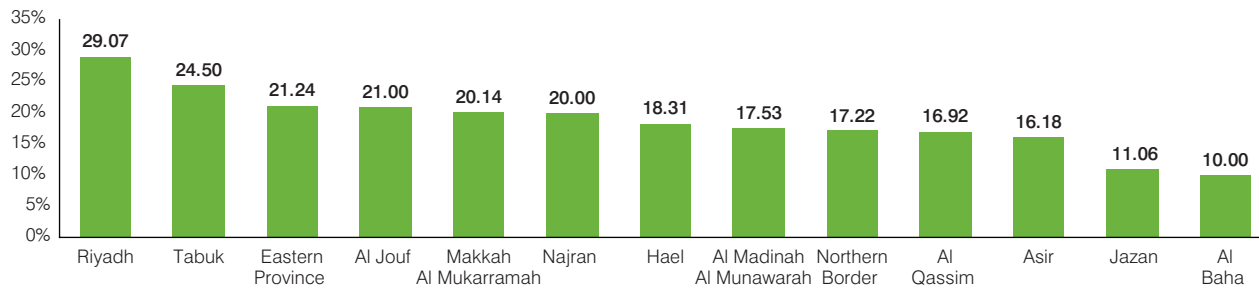
As one might expect, the number of divorce certificates issued in Saudi Arabia in 2008 was highest in the most populated urban areas: Riyadh (7,694), Makkah Al Mukarramah (6,287), Asir (2,503), the Eastern Province (2,251), and Al Madinah Al Munawarah (1,909). These are areas where women are attending university and participating in the labor market to a greater extent than elsewhere in Saudi Arabia. Similarly, in the UAE, 2008 official data shows that the number of registered divorce certificates was highest in major urban emirates such as Abu Dhabi (1,156), Sharjah (428), Dubai (399), and Ras Al-Khaima (180).

What is surprising, however, is that the divorce rate—i.e., the number of divorces as a percentage of marriages—was relatively high not just in these urban areas but also in less populated traditional areas, where local customs remain highly traditional and women’s education and employment levels are lower. This proved true in Tabuk, Al Jouf, and Najran in Saudi Arabia, and Fujeira and Ajman in the UAE (see *Exhibit B*).

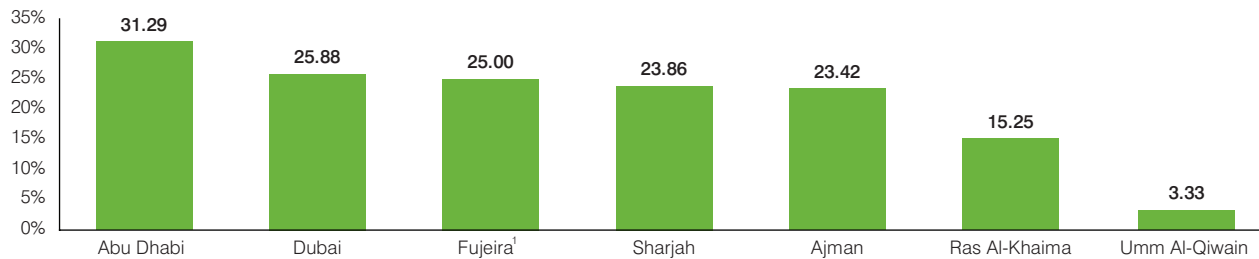
**Exhibit B**  
Both Rural and Urban Areas in Saudi Arabia and the UAE Experience High Rates of Divorce

### DIVORCE RATES AS A PERCENTAGE OF MARRIAGES BY REGION AMONG SAUDIS AND EMIRATIS (2008)

#### Saudi Arabia



#### United Arab Emirates



<sup>1</sup> Rate calculated based on estimate of total population.

Source: Statistics Authority, Ministry of Justice, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, *Statistics Book for Marriage & Divorce No. 33 (1429 H)* 2008, p. 23; Ministry of Justice: Department of Justice, Abu Dhabi; Dubai Courts Department; Courts of Ras Al-Khaima; Statistics (2005–2008), Table 2/33

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## CURRENT LEGAL AND SOCIAL INITIATIVES RELATED TO DIVORCE

There is increasing awareness in the GCC region of both the spread of divorce and the negative impact it has on the family as the basic unit of Gulf societies. This has led governments and others—including nongovernmental groups, religious officials, and healthcare workers—to take a number of initiatives to mitigate the damage caused by divorce. These efforts fall into two categories: strengthening marriage and slowing the rising rates of divorce, and putting in place measures that make divorce less painful when it is unavoidable.

### Slowing the Rising Rate of Divorce

In Saudi Arabia, the Shoura' Council is considering the implementation of a new law based on regulations issued in July 2008 by the Ministry of Justice that would prevent husbands from recklessly pronouncing *Talaq*, the words of divorce, in the absence of their wives or without informing them. The regulations also would require that in order to be valid, the divorce would have to be registered in a courtroom in the presence of both spouses.<sup>18</sup>

In another move proposed to curb the incidence of divorce, the Ministry of Social Affairs is considering

making premarriage training courses, focusing on how to maintain family stability, compulsory for those planning marriage.<sup>19</sup>

Another social initiative has been the establishment in Riyadh of the Charity Center for Social Guidance and Family Consultations, which provides preventive and therapeutic social services for family problems related to marital abuse and divorce.

A number of nongovernmental organizations in Riyadh, Jeddah, Makkah Al Mukarramah, and Al Madinah Al Munawarah have been active in providing awareness campaigns for women about the negative impact of divorce on the family. Training courses are organized for young brides-to-be on how to be good housewives and for recent divorcees on how to cope with their new status. One of these organizations, Mawadda Philanthropy for Divorce Issues, established in 2009 in Riyadh, is the first association specializing in divorce and is in the process of launching, in coordination with the government, a major study of rising divorce rates in the country and an assessment of the best ways to prevent divorce.

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In Kuwait, the government has organized several programs through mosques and schools to promote awareness of divorce's disruptive impacts and the responsibilities of married partners.<sup>20</sup> The Center of Social Services at Kuwait University has held at least one seminar for students in which a marriage counselor addressed common misperceptions about marriage as well as the importance of understanding some common challenges in relationships.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, a recent study from the parliamentary general secretariat's research department calls for premarital counseling programs for engaged couples to increase awareness about long commitments and responsibilities and duties in marriage.<sup>22</sup>

In the UAE, the judicial system established a Family Guidance

Division to resolve family problems amicably and reconcile spouses without their having to resort to the courts. It was reportedly able to successfully arbitrate settlements in 94 percent of the 4,970 disputes received between January and September 2009.<sup>23</sup> Imams of UAE mosques are also raising awareness of the divorce problem in their Friday sermons by calling on Muslims to consider other solutions instead of taking the ultimate step of divorce, which should occur only when reconciliation is impossible.<sup>24</sup>

In Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum set up the Marriage Fund to educate young people about successful family lives. It is developing a database on marriage and divorce and collaborates with specialized government agencies to reduce the rates of divorce in the country.<sup>25</sup>

Additionally, the nongovernmental organization Dubai Women Association has launched a family program that it calls "The Successful Marriage, Half a Moon," which focuses on family stability through proactive counseling. It has published a book called *Successful Marriage* to help couples cope with marital challenges and orient them toward a successful marriage.<sup>26</sup>

#### **Mitigating the Effects of Divorce**

An array of other initiatives are aimed at ameliorating the detrimental side effects of divorce for women and children by strengthening their rights in the divorce process.

For example, the Muscat Document on the Unified Personal Laws in the GCC countries, which was approved by the GCC Supreme Council in December 1996, was seen as a groundbreaking step because it set

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up a model for codifying Shari'a-based family laws in the Gulf. Five of the GCC members followed with codifications of these national laws that govern issues such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody; Saudi Arabia is now considering codifying a family law document. These codifications reduce the scope for judicial decisions that are unfavorable to women's rights as they are mostly based on patriarchal attitudes. However, women are still subject to discrimination owing to the lack of legal enforcement mechanisms for ensuring implementation of women's legal rights.

In Bahrain, in May 2009, King Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa approved the new codified family law, which applies only to Sunni religious courts. Another sign of progress appeared in Bahrain in 2006 when it appointed a female judge, Mona Jassem Al Kawari, at the Grand Civil Court.<sup>27</sup> Some of Bahrain's law firms also employ female attorneys who specialize in divorce, making it easier for women seeking to end their marriages to discuss their situation.

Kuwait has also shown support for the victims of divorce, as its Public Authority for Housing Welfare has

decided to pay a housing allowance to divorced Kuwaiti mothers who have been granted custody of their children.<sup>28</sup>

In Qatar, the codification of family laws enhanced women's custodial rights, granting Qatari women custody of their sons up to age 13 and daughters up to 15. In February 2003, Mariam Abdullah Al Jaber was appointed as the first district attorney in Qatar and the Gulf region, and in March 2010, Sheikha Maha Mansour Salman Jassem Al Thani was appointed as the first female judge in the court. Although women lawyers

*“I have launched the Saudi Divorce Initiative website to discuss the plight of divorced women. We offer the right kind of information for divorced women and we help through our personal services in offering them advice and explanation in how to proceed for a divorce without a lawyer and to get their official rights, which are those of the Shari'a. We are getting positive results.”*

— Haifa'a Khalid, Saudi women's rights activist, founder of the Saudi Divorce Initiative and president of the E-Society for Divorce

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have been practicing since 2000, their number remains limited.

In March 2008, UAE lawyer and Shari'a specialist Kholoud Ahmad Al Daheri was appointed a primary judge at the Abu Dhabi Judiciary Department (ADJD).<sup>29</sup> The appointment of female judges makes it more likely that women will be more considerate when it comes to the interpretation of family law. Also in the UAE, codification of personal status laws along the lines of the Muscat Document brought benefits to Emirati women when it comes to *Khal'a* in that men can no longer refuse divorce requests from wives, nor delay giving their assent for long periods.

Divorce reform in Saudi Arabia has been under way since 2008,

when Haifa'a Khalid called for the codification of personal status laws in the kingdom. She also launched the Saudi Divorce Initiative website to draw attention to the plight of divorced women. The National Human Rights Society, a semi-official organization, plans to launch its own website as a reference source to deal with problems of divorced women with the help of law experts and social consultants.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, Sheikh Salman Al Audah, an influential, outspoken Muslim scholar, called in 2008 for the launching of a "Divorce Document in Saudi Arabia" to safeguard the rights of divorced women who endure the social, financial, and psychological problems of divorce. He also insisted on the implementation and

enforcement of legal regulations that guarantee the Shari'a rights of divorced women.

One indication of support in Saudi Arabia was a show of financial assistance for divorced women when King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud ordered in September 2009 the payment of a significant amount of money in emergency aid for the poor registered for social insurance, including divorced women.<sup>31</sup>

In February 2010, Saudi Arabian Justice Minister Mohammed Al-Eissa announced that the government is planning to allow female lawyers to begin appearing in court to represent women in matters related to divorce, child custody, and other family issues.<sup>32</sup>

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## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS ON DIVORCE IN GCC COUNTRIES**

These initiatives are a good start, but more can be done. The first step in formulating responses is to get a better understanding of the issue. GCC governments should increase research on the unknown aspects of the divorce phenomenon in the Gulf: Why are so many young people divorcing so soon after getting married? What is the impact of working wives on the marital home? Would more flexible schedules help? How can young people learn the communication skills and personal virtues that are needed to make marriages successful? How can discrimination against women in courts be countered?

It would also be beneficial to investigate potential tools for divorce prevention. This effort should include, in each of the GCC countries, the establishment of statistical databases on different social groups, as well as timely surveys of judges, divorced men and women, schoolteachers, mental health professionals, and social workers on relevant themes. These research efforts should be coordinated among the ministries of justice, social affairs, economy and planning, education, and health, and with the cooperation of major universities and local research centers.

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As with existing initiatives, proposed initiatives should be understood in terms of whether they help to prevent divorce or whether they ameliorate the effects of divorce when it is unavoidable.

#### **Preventing Divorce**

Education curricula in secondary schools should include courses related to family relationships and social bonds between family members. Outside the education environment, governments and NGOs could launch awareness-raising campaigns for both men and women to foster

a better understanding of equality between the sexes, the importance of family life, and how husbands and wives bear reciprocal rights and duties toward each other.

Governments and NGOs could also establish advisory centers for family consultation, allowing couples to seek counseling before and after marriage and divorce. These centers, funded by the government, NGOs, and private donations, would encourage family dialogue and organize premarriage training sessions for couples to make them aware of women's legal

rights and the mutual requirements and responsibilities of married life. Couples could be given information on these sessions when they go for their mandatory premarital blood tests.

#### **Ameliorating the Effects of Divorce**

When divorce has already occurred or cannot be prevented, other steps are needed to make sure that families do not suffer from negative attitudes and financial deprivation. For instance, public campaigns could seek to change the negative stereotypes of divorced women in order to promote cultural changes at all levels of society.

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One emphasis may be to strengthen legal protections for women and children and enforce the implementation of laws preserving the rights of divorced women. Until now, the GCC nations' implementation of international agreements has been sporadic and inconsistent. It is essential that they consider issuing divorce regulations that guarantee the rights of divorced women. The six GCC countries should bring their national laws into conformity with their international commitment to gender equality. It is also important for Saudi Arabia to

codify the law of personal status, as the other five GCC countries have done, since this measure would be a basis for defining and protecting the rights of women and children in family law.

To put these measures in place, each GCC country could establish a high-level commission for family affairs charged with monitoring the implementation of international conventions and government decisions regarding divorced women's rights—modeled, perhaps, on the Supreme Council for Women in

Bahrain and Qatar's Supreme Council for Family Affairs. The commission would function as a monitoring mechanism for the advancement of women. Part of its mandate would be to devise a national strategy to promote awareness of women's rights in divorce proceedings. The commission should be independent and have a direct connection with higher authorities, with the right to supervise the implementation of rules by government institutions. Connections between the commission and government authorities would be maintained through government

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representatives to provide support for families in need. The commission would need to build special working relations with the judicial courts, the police, and the individual ministries of justice, social affairs, health, and education, as well as with the private sector and NGOs. Nongovernmental organizations can also play an active role in helping family members solve their problems by running awareness-raising programs on women's rights and how they can be exercised.

Policymakers could improve women's access to justice in divorce by encouraging women to join the legal profession and by appointing female lawyers to judicial positions. Female

university students could be given scholarships to attend law school and given part-time internships in law firms to instill a desire to practice this profession. Also, governments could set up specialized offices for women within the official courts so as to identify and deal with the problems of divorced women. To address one frequent problem, governments could ensure that every divorced woman receives her post-divorce support from her ex-husband's salary by putting in place mechanisms for deducting those amounts in coordination with the ministries of social affairs.

Governments and the medical profession, too, could cooperate

in setting up special clinics with mental health experts who could help divorced partners and their children cope with the psychological and emotional fallout of seeing their families disrupted. As one clinical psychologist said, "We need specialized units and health institutes to treat divorced women and their children suffering from the trauma of divorce. We need to give them psychological, social, and financial support to decrease the emotional pressure on them, and we need to encourage family dialogue. All this should be within the planning of the ministry of health, social affairs and in coordination with women's nongovernmental organizations."

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## CONCLUSION

The rising incidence of divorce is deeply affecting families, which represent the basic unit of Gulf society. Policymakers are increasingly aware of the need to address accelerating divorce rates. Yet the full extent and impact of the problem have not been accurately documented. Until they are, they cannot fully be addressed.

What is clear at this juncture, however, is that women are bearing the brunt of the consequences of rising divorce rates, as well as a heavy burden due to laws and customs surrounding divorce in the GCC. Women are among a nation's most important assets, but to date, the potential of women as economic players has been unrealized. Now, however, women are coming into their own because of greater opportunities in education and the workplace. They account for half the region's population. And they hold the key to the future as transmitters of cultural values and traditions to new generations.

Societies therefore should do all they can to ensure that women are not emotionally or financially crippled by

divorce. They should do their utmost to prevent divorce when possible, and to minimize its damaging effects when not possible. Women should not be discriminated against in divorce proceedings, and should receive their legal rights, including the right to initiate and obtain a divorce for good cause.

It is vital that GCC governments ensure that legislation defines and protects the rights of women and children in family law, and that existing legislation be rigorously implemented so that divorced women are not discriminated against. An independent high commission for family affairs should be established in each country to work with the judicial courts, the police, and the relevant ministries, as well as with the private sector and NGOs, to promote awareness and monitor implementation and enforcement of women's legal rights in all areas. Developing a humane and sensible approach to the social challenge of divorce and its reverberations is a task not just for governments but for all of society.

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All quotes in the text are from personal interviews with the author unless otherwise noted.

## About the Author

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) consists of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

<sup>2</sup> *Kuwait Times*, July 24, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Silsilat Kitab al Oumma (Book Series of the Nation): *Family Disintegration: Reasons and Solutions*; Co-authors: Dr. Aminah al Jaber, Dr. Saleh Ibrahim Al Sanie, and Sheikha Alanoud bint Thamer Al Thani, Number 83, Jamadi al Oula, 1422, August 2001; International Number: 99921-48-19-5; pp. 1, 2, 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.11, 21.

<sup>5</sup> [www.saudidivorce.org](http://www.saudidivorce.org).

<sup>6</sup> Ian Bremmer, *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall* (Simon & Schuster, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Nasra M. Shah, "Women's Socioeconomic Characteristics and Marital Patterns in a Rapidly Developing Muslim Society, Kuwait," in *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, vol. 35, no. 2; Spring 2004; pp.164–165.

<sup>8</sup> *Gulf News* (UAE), July 26, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> *The Peninsula* (Qatar), January 3, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> *Kuwait Times*, June 10, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> *Gulf News*, February 21, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Early marriage of girls is still a problem in pockets of Saudi society. There is no legal age for marriage for boys or girls in Saudi Arabia. In response to some recently publicized high-profile cases, the Saudi Human Rights Commission (SHRC) is studying the issue of setting a legal minimum age for marriage of 17 for women and 18 for men. See *UNICEF, Saudi Arabia*; [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org).

<sup>13</sup> Yahya El-Haddad, "Major Trends Affecting Families in the Gulf Countries," Bahrain University, May 2003.

<sup>14</sup> *Gulf News*, October 26, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Planning, Statistics & Census Sector, Kuwait, *Annual Bulletin for Vital Statistics: Marriage and Divorce, 2007*, p. 104, Table 16: Divorce Declarations by Educational Status of Husband, Nationality of Wife and Educational Status, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Planning, Statistics & Census Sector, State of Kuwait, *Annual Bulletin for Vital Statistics: Marriage and Divorce, 2007*, Table 17.

<sup>17</sup> Louay Bahry, "Marriage Advertisements in Saudi Arabia," *The Middle East Institute; Encounter*, No. 7, March 2008.

<sup>18</sup> [www.arabianbusiness.com](http://www.arabianbusiness.com), July 14, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), June 28, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> *Kuwait Times*, February 15, 2010; *Kuwait Times*, October 15, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> *Kuwait Times*, May 20, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> *Gulf News*, July 9, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> WAM (Emirates News Agency), November 9, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> WAM (Emirates News Agency), May 10, 2008.

<sup>25</sup> WAM (Emirates News Agency), October 2, 2009.

<sup>26</sup> *Gulf News*, November 3, 2008.

<sup>27</sup> [www.aljazeera.net](http://www.aljazeera.net), June 7, 2006.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* (19).

<sup>29</sup> <http://gulfnews.com>, March 15, 2010.

<sup>30</sup> *Saudi Gazette*, February 15, 2010.

<sup>31</sup> *Arab News*, September 14, 2009.

<sup>32</sup> *Arab News*, February 21 and 23, 2010; BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>; February 21, 2010.

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