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Presenting a Model of Compromise and Withdrawal of Divorce in Couples Applying for Consensual Divorce: A Grounded Theory Study

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The current investigation was carried out to explore the underlying reasons behind compromise and withdrawal of divorce among couples seeking consensual separation.

Methods: A qualitative approach was employed in this study, utilizing the grounded theory method. The sample consisted of 9 couples who had sought services at the West Tehran Health Center, specifically those who had retracted their decision for consensual divorce in 2022, chosen through purposive sampling. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, with data analysis following the systematic framework proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

Results: Through the open, axial, and selective coding processes, various concepts emerged including causal, contextual, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences. The central category identified in the research findings was the notion of compromise with existing circumstances and the decision to sustain the cohabitation process. Causal conditions encompassed financial constraints, parental responsibilities, second chances, fear of solitude, lack of support, and indecision regarding divorce. Contextual conditions included dependent personalities, family conflicts, decision-making dilemmas, and uncertainties. Interfering conditions involved cultural and social influences, limited opportunities, and lack of individual autonomy. Upon comprehensive analysis of the paradigmatic model categories, a conclusion was drawn.

Conclusions: . The findings highlighted the efficacy of adaptive strategies such as compromise, self-regulation, counseling, and professional assistance in fostering satisfaction and continuation of cohabitation, contrasting with ineffective strategies like avoidance and destructive behaviors that led to dissatisfaction with shared lives.

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Introduction

Divorce is a complex phenomenon with implications for various aspects of individuals' well-being, encompassing health, psychological health, as well as economic and social dimensions (Leopold , 2018), leading to cognitive, emotional, social, and psychological repercussions for the involved parties (Schaan et al., 2019). The legal concept of divorce entails a process where spouses agree to seek dissolution through family court, addressing financial obligations and matters concerning shared children (Shariati & Safdarzadeh, 2017). The decision to opt for a consensual divorce reflects a certain level of discontent and intolerance within the marital relationship, resulting in a relatively swift and discreet separation process (Apostu, 2019). Presently, globally, the prevalence of consensual divorce surpasses that of contested divorces, partly due to prolonged legal proceedings in the latter, prompting couples to opt for mutual agreement instead. Hence, engaging in cooperative efforts and mutual agreement during a consensual divorce minimizes conflict for both parties involved (Hald et al., 2020). Despite being a prompt resolution to an undesirable situation, some individuals exhibit ambivalence during counseling sessions and retract their decision to separate (Heydari et al., 2019). Choosing between continuing a shared life or opting for divorce poses a significant challenge, with studies indicating that 23% of divorce cases remain unresolved as couples reconsider their decision (Allen & Hawkins, 2017). Research suggests that the primary driver towards consensual divorce lies in the arduous nature of the legal divorce process, the challenges and stigma associated with it, as well as the psychological distress experienced by women in unilateral divorces and the trauma associated with court proceedings (Mohammad Taghizadeh, 2020).

Emotionally, deciding to pursue a divorce is a formidable choice, given the legal implications and the subsequent process of rebuilding one's life. The apprehension regarding the consequences of divorce often leads individuals to overemphasize the negative aftermath of separation, thereby fostering a fear of societal disapproval that complicates decision-making. Moreover, the stress stemming from the divorce decision, especially when children are involved, often postpones the formal separation process (Apostu, 2019). The retraction of a consensual divorce decision may occur due to various reasons, with some couples seeking to renegotiate or find common ground. They may challenge the finality of the divorce decision and even assign blame to the other party, thus engaging in a struggle against the idea of separation (Oren & Hadomi, 2020).

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In most cases, when the marital relationship is ending due to divorce; Mediation, counseling for compromise and reconciliation of couples is recommended. Maybe in mutual compromise, couples are willing to compromise in order to re-establish their marital relationship. In other words, joint decision-making by couples on the verge of separation; The reconciliation process replaces divorce (Hassan et al., 2020). In fact, marital compromise or compatibility is a situation in which husband and wife experience happiness and satisfaction from each other most of the time (Peterson et al., 2014). The quality of marriage and cohabitation depends on the concept of compromise with the spouse, which provides the satisfaction of couples, and the state of non-compromise causes the occurrence of negative behaviors and makes the warm and intimate center of the family face tension and confusion (Mutlu et al., 2018). On the other hand, compromise in family lawsuits reduces emotional and economic costs as well as dispute resolution. Also, in marriage dissolution lawsuits, using the compromise method reduces tensions between couples and ultimately prevents harm to the family's children (Maboudi Neishabouri & Rezaei, 2021).

Dailey et al. (2023) in research by compiling a comprehensive model of distress after the dissolution of a marital relationship, found that people with attachment anxiety; They often find it difficult to adapt to the separation and ruminate on the dissolution of the relationship. These people show distress related to confusion and seek to restore the relationship to get rid of the uncertainty and distress. Harris et al. (2022) found in research entitled the effect of identity on divorce decision-making; The decision to divorce is strongly influenced by how people perceive themselves and others. In other words, a change in the identity perceived by people and that they clearly think of themselves as failures and failures; It may hinder the pursuit of the decision to divorce. The results of Cope and Mattingly's (2021) research show that people who have a high level of anxiety and attachment are more willing to compromise and revive a relationship in order to resolve the self-concept confusion caused by the separation. have been dissolved, that is why they prevent divorce. In a study, Doherty et al. (2021) observed a significant rate of ambivalence towards divorce and a tendency towards fire services (reconciliation) in the research participants. According to Jacobsen's (2021) research findings, ambivalence in the decision to break up or stay in a relationship; It leads to an increase in marital distress, physical problems, and mental health problems for couples and their families, on this basis, these couples can benefit from counseling

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to make an informed decision. Based on the research results of Hassan et al. (2020), it is possible to resolve marital disputes outside of the court and before divorce occurs through mediation and the use of expert counselors. The process of conflict resolution and compromise helps both couples to maintain their existing marital relationship. According to the research results of Crabtree and Harris (2020), separation before legal divorce can be an ambiguous situation. Separation does not always begin with the intention of divorce; Perhaps, for some couples, the time of separation is an opportunity for compromise and reconciliation.

According to the results of Salimi et al.'s research (2020), a set of intra-personal, interpersonal and social factors can explain the survival of women in unsatisfactory marriages. Women who are dissatisfied with their marital relationship due to the existing dependencies, maintain their dissatisfied marriage and use different strategies to adapt to the existing conditions. The results of Pourmoosavi et al.'s study (2019) show that some women regret their request for divorce and the decision to return to life; Due to the existence of a child, the bad view of the society, fear of loneliness, not having a supporter, giving a second chance and a dependent personality. Pirak et al. (2019) found in research some couples regret their divorce decision due to social and economic problems after divorce. The results of Morovati Sharifabad et al.'s research (2017) showed that although divorce is considered as the last solution and most couples fully intended to divorce; But some hoped by asking for divorce; Punish your wife and force her to behave better; Therefore, training and counseling can be useful for these people. The results of Hatfirad et al.'s research (2022) in the field of managing conflicts and tensions in the family and improving the relationships of couples showed that the heterogeneity of couples in solving problems causes each couple to use different strategies to face and solve life's problems, which ultimately The tension between them escalates. The results of Arami et al.'s research (2023) with the title of identifying preventive components of family breakdown showed that mutual trust building between couples along with the use of educational and skill strategies leads to the consequences of strengthening internal bonds, healthy lifestyle and family orientation.

Among the factors necessitating research are the rising number of divorces in Iran, particularly in cases of consensual divorce. An analysis of the most recent report from the Iranian Statistics Center (2023) highlights a notable increase in divorce rates over the past decade, with a 40% decline in marriage and a 43% surge in divorces during the 2010s. The year 2011 witnessed 142,841 divorce

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cases, a figure that escalated to 204,487 by 2021. Additionally, 2022 saw 524,129 marriages and 204,301 divorces, indicating a 43% rise in divorces compared to 2011, translating to almost one divorce for every three marriages. Notably, approximately 80% of divorce instances in the judicial system are classified as "consensual divorce," with the remainder initiated by the wife or a few by the husband (Khatibi and Alaikhanipour, 2022). Another imperative for conducting this research pertains to the attention required for couples who retract their decision during the legal divorce process and mandatory counseling, a prerequisite for consensual divorce. Despite facing challenges and negative encounters, these couples express a desire to preserve and perpetuate their marital union. The motivations behind these retractions vary, yet have received limited scholarly inquiry. Given the dearth of studies examining the reasons behind compromise and withdrawal in consensual divorces, as well as the post-compromise quality of life for couples, the researcher opted for an investigation utilizing qualitative grounded theory, despite scarce resources in this domain. The research endeavor seeks to address the query of what factors contribute to divorce withdrawal and compromise among couples seeking consensual divorce. Furthermore, it aims to ascertain whether the findings can facilitate the development of a conceptual framework in this realm.

Materials and Methods

This research was conducted with a qualitative approach and grounded theory. Due to the exploratory nature of the research and the lack of research in the studied area, the grounded theory is a suitable method that provides the possibility of collecting in-depth information and can be used as a valuable source for the direction of the research (Corbin & Strauss, 1998). The studied population were couples applying for a consensual divorce who were introduced to West Tehran Health Center in 2022, and during the counseling sessions, they gave up on the divorce and made a compromise. The sampling method was accessible. Considering that the criterion of the studied sample size was data saturation; Therefore, after interviewing 18 people (9 couples), the data reached theoretical saturation and the interview was stopped.

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Research tool

The main tool of data collection in the research was semi-structured interview. Also, other data collection methods were used in qualitative research, such as field notes, observation and audio recording.

Implementation method

Interviews were conducted with each couple alone in a period of 5 months (from January 2022 to May 2023) and each couple's interview session lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The obtained data were analyzed according to the systematic three-step approach of Corbin and Strauss (1998), during a regular and continuous process. The coding process was implemented during data collection. First, the audio file of the interviews was recorded. After each interview, the recorded audio file was carefully implemented and converted into text with the same speech format of the interviewees. After several times comparing the interview texts with the recorded sessions and verifying the accuracy of the information; Line by line analysis was done and meaningful phrases were identified and expressed in the form of a short conceptual statement. A code was assigned to each phrase according to the meaning of the sentence and noted in the margin of the typed text. Finally, compare the codes; duplicate codes were removed and similar codes were grouped together based on common features and dimensions.

In order to achieve reliability, three methods were used include the supervision by experts (supervision by three experts on different stages of coding and conceptualization and extraction of categories), control and validation by the sample group (the sample group was asked to comment on its accuracy while evaluating the data) and analytical comparisons (regular reference to raw data and frequent comparison and evaluation of data). The percentage of agreement for the three interviews was 68%, 70%, and 74%, respectively, and in general, the reliability obtained from the agreement of the two coders according to the calculations (71%) indicates its appropriateness. This research was taken from the doctoral thesis and was conducted under the supervision of the Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University- Central Tehran Branch and with the code of ethics IR.IAU.CTB.REC.1402.059. Ethical considerations including obtaining informed consent, guaranteeing privacy and confidentiality during the interview were observed. According to the conditions and time of the interview while emphasizing the confidentiality of the answers, the participants were free to withdraw from the research.

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Results

The demographic information of 9 couples participating in this study who have refused to divorce by agreement is reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants

Couple	Gende	Age	Job	Education	Marriage age (year)	Divorce withdrawal duration (month)	N of children
1	Female	30	Housekeeper	diploma	11	10	2
	Male	32	self-employment	diploma			
2	Female	29	Housekeeper	diploma	9	8	1
	Male	33	Repairman	diploma			
3	Female	45	Housekeeper	diploma	19	9	2
	Male	53	Driver	diploma			
4	Female	29	Housekeeper	diploma	9	11	1
	Male	34	Operating Room Technician	Associate Degree			
5	Female	33	Employee	Bachelor'	3	7	0
	Male	36	Manager of company	Bachelor			
6	Female	37	nail specialist	دیپلم	17	12	2
	Male	42	Food Industry Engineer	Bachelor			
7	Female	42	Publishing Office	Master	13	12	2
	Male	40	Publishing s Office	diploma			
8	Female	27	admin page	diploma	7	8	0
	Male	39	announcer	diploma			
9	Female	37	Dental assistant	Associate	8	10	0
	Male	42	Driver	Associate			

Data analysis and coding using the systematic approach of Strauss and Corbin; In the form of a three-step process, open coding (discovery of concepts), axial coding (discovery of components) and selective coding (discovery of main categories) took place, which led to the identification of 126 secondary codes, 31 main concepts and 17 categories. Also, in the central coding stage, the main categories extracted in the form of conditions (causal, contextual, intervening) and strategies and consequences emerged around the central phenomenon of the specific research and the paradigmatic model of the causes of compromise and withdrawal from consensual divorce of couples.

The central phenomenon

The central category is a mental form of a phenomenon that forms the basis of the process and always appears in the data, and all other main categories are related to it. In the current research, compromise with existing conditions and continuing the process of living together was identified

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as a central category, which includes the concepts of "ability to deal with life's problems, trying to continue life, building trust and preventing tension in the family."

Table 2. Concepts and categories related to the central category (phenomenon)

Central phenomenon (categories)	Open coding (discovering concepts)	
	Main concepts	Primary concepts (secondary codes)
Ability to deal with life's problems	Ability to deal with life's problems	The ability to face life's challenges and problems, knowing that problems can be solved, empathy and patience when problems arise
	Trying to continue life	Trying to have a normal and peaceful life, trying to maintain and sustain life, accepting the new situation and trying to improve the situation
	Trust building	Keeping secrets and keeping family secrets, trusting each other in a relationship, expressing the desire to maintain a married life, accepting one's mistakes and being honest
	Preventing tension in the family	Avoiding arguments and fights, avoiding blaming and humiliating each other, keeping silent in front of the wife's harsh behavior

1 -The concept of the ability to deal with life's problems

Living together has its own ups and downs, and couples always face challenges and problems throughout their lives. The ability to face life's challenges and problems, to consider problems as solvable, empathy and patience when problems arise are among the concerns of couples. In the present study, a number of couples stated that when they filed for divorce, they were not willing to work together to solve their life problems and challenges under any circumstances, and they found it difficult to face life's problems. Couple 1- The woman, confirming this concept, said: "*Before, when a problem or dispute happened, we couldn't solve it. We didn't understand each other's words at all, that's why we used to fight more and get upset and our problem couldn't be solved." But now it's not like that anymore, we learned to listen to each other without getting angry, talk to each other away from the children's eyes and look for solutions together*".

2 -The concept of trying to continue life

The life together undergoes many changes and transformations from the beginning to the end; In this regard, conflict and disagreement are inevitable. Some couples after giving up on divorce to preserve and sustain life, have a normal and peaceful life, accept the new situation and improve the conditions; They always try. In this case, the 4-woman couple says about the concept of "trying to have a normal and calm life": "*Since I returned home and we decided to live together again, I have been trying very hard to have a good and calm life." I try not to be too sensitive, not to blame and focus on my life so that we can be calm again*", or the 6-male couple says about the concept of "accepting the

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new situation and trying to improve the situation": "*We both accepted that we have flaws and In order to live together with our children, we must fix these problems and try to live a better life*".

3 -The concept of trust building

The basis of any relationship is trust and it leads to better understanding and mutual respect. When trust is lost, the relationship becomes extremely destructive and chaotic. Trust building in this research was expressed in the form of the concepts of secrecy and keeping family secrets, trusting each other in a relationship, expressing the desire to preserve married life, accepting one's mistakes and having honest behavior.

Couple 9- The woman, in support of the concept of "keeping secrets and keeping family secrets", says: "*Previously, my wife used to inform her family of every discussion and conversation that took place at home and every decision we wanted to make as a couple, and this was the reason for their interference and our fights. But now I have more confidence in my wife than before because she understands the issue and life issues, arguments and conversations between us are no longer reflected anywhere*". Couple 6- The man confirms the open codes of "accepting his mistakes and being honest and trusting each other in the relationship" says: "*I accept my mistakes that I didn't trust my wife, I doubted her, I didn't believe her words, I always controlled her, permission I didn't let him leave the house alone, when I saw that our life was in danger and he was planning to separate, I tried to change my behavior during the time we were living together, I stopped controlling and doubting. It was very difficult at first, but with the help of my wife and her patience, we were able to trust me again. do."*

4 -The concept of preventing tension in the family

Arguments between couples lead to dissatisfaction in their life together. When the incompatibility and tensions in life exceed the limits, the psychological and emotional security of the family is at risk. In order to reduce tension in the family, couples use measures such as avoiding arguments and fights, avoiding blaming and humiliating each other, remaining silent in the face of their spouse's aggressive behavior, and in this study, the participants mentioned some of these strategies, for example, couple number 3- male He says this about the concept of "avoidance of arguments and fights": "*I control myself; I get less angry than before, I don't fight with my wife and my son. "I increased my working hours so that I would be at home less, so that there would be less arguments and arguments. When I am at home, I try to listen to and understand my wife's words and don't argue too much." In confirmation of the concept of "silence in front of his wife's harsh behavior"*, couple number 5-wife

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states: "*My husband's behavior has been harsh since the beginning, he is very rude and gets angry easily. We used to fight a lot and that's why we wanted to separate." But after counseling and reconciliation, whenever I am angry, I keep silent, I don't discuss. I will wait when my wife is calmer so that we can talk and express my wishes. This way, we will fight less."* In support of the concept of "preventing blaming and humiliating each other", couple number 9- woman says: "*My wife used to have bad manners, she used to make fun of me in front of her family. He used to say my faults in front of everyone and humiliated me, and this always caused a difference between us. Sometimes I humiliated him in order to retaliate and it was two-way. Now we have put aside this morality and we respect each other both in our privacy and in front of our family, friends and acquaintances.*

Causal conditions

Causal conditions are categories related to conditions that affect the central category. In the current research, financial and economic resources, responsibility towards children, new opportunity, fear of loneliness and isolation, lack of a supporter and lack of a definite decision to divorce are causal conditions that directly affect the central category.

Table 3. Concepts and categories related to causal conditions

Central phenomenon (categories)	Open coding (discovering concepts)	
	Main concepts	Primary concepts (secondary codes)
Financial and economic resources	Lack of financial independence	Not having a source of income, financial dependence on spouse, lack of steady job
	Economic hardships	Inability to pay for housing, worry about not paying for living expenses, not paying for the expenses of an autistic child, not being able to afford the main family and parents, being a burden on one's own parents.
Responsibility for children	Parent-child interdependence	Dependence on children, love and affection for children, children's dependence on their father and their obedience to him
	Vulnerability of children	Children's indecision after parents' divorce, fear of children's future, presence of an autistic child, presence of an infant child
Chance again	Chance again	Giving yourself and your spouse another chance, making up for mistakes, giving your spouse another chance
	Hope to restore the relationship	Fixing your faults and repairing the relationship, hope for change with counseling
Fear of loneliness and isolation	Fear of loneliness and isolation	Fear of living alone, fear of being alone in the future, being away from family and parents
Absence of a supporter	Absence of a supporter	Not having a sponsor, not having a proper support, not having support from the family
No definite decision to divorce	No definite decision to divorce	Punishing the wife by asking for divorce, scaring the wife to be stubborn with the wife

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The category of financial and economic resources

The economic situation and conditions of the couple is considered one of the most important areas of willingness to compromise, in this research financial and economic resources are the two main concepts of lack of financial independence and economic bottlenecks.

1 -The concept of lack of financial independence: couples who do not have a stable and independent job and are financially dependent on their spouse; They are more inclined to continue living together and take the path of peace and compromise. This concept includes the open codes of "not having a source of income, financial dependence and not having a stable job". In support of the concept of "financial dependence on the wife", couple 7- the man says: "*The house belongs to my wife, I don't have anything of my own and I work in my wife's office." With a divorce at this age, I would have lost my job and had no place to live, and my wife also wanted custody of the children. If I got a divorce, I would be unemployed, I would have to return to the city to my family, away from my children, and this would bother me a lot".*

2 -The concept of economic bottlenecks: Inability to pay for housing, worry about not providing for living expenses, not providing for the expenses of an autistic child, lack of financial ability of the main parents' family and the feeling of being a burden on their parents were among the most important concerns of the couples who had given up on the consensual divorce. In support of the concept of "failure to provide living expenses", two of the participants commented as follows:

Couple 8- Woman "*My parents separated and both of them have an independent life. In the few months that I lived apart, I had no money, I borrowed everything from my mother and friends. My mother used to pay for my treatment and it was hard for her to get money from her husband every time*. In support of the concept of "inability to pay for housing", the 3-male couple says: "*Before, I put the house in my wife's name. If we separated, I would not have a place and I could not pay for the children and rent a house for myself. It is very difficult to make a living".*

The category of responsibility towards children

Some couples decide to compromise and repair their marital bond because of their responsibility towards their children, the interdependence of parents and children, and the vulnerability of children.

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1 -The concept of parent-child interdependence: This concept includes dependence on children, love and affection for children, dependence of children on parents, dependence of children on father and following his example.

Couple 2- The woman confirms the concept of "children's dependence on the father and following his example" says: "*My son has autism and has communication problems, he is very dependent on my wife, he prefers to spend time with my wife, he goes to football with my wife, and even if he goes to school If it's a holiday, he makes an excuse and goes to work with my wife. In short, he depends on his father in every way, and I don't give myself the right to separate the child for myself.*

2 -The concept of children's vulnerability: The primary concepts of children's indecision after parents' divorce, fear of children's future, the presence of an autistic child, the presence of an infant child was raised by the interviewees in this research in the form of the main concept of children's vulnerability. Couple 7-female in confirmation of the concepts of "fear of children's future". And "the presence of an infant child" says: "*My eldest son studies in a gifted school and during the time we had a fight and disagreement, he suffered a drop in education. My younger son, who was an infant, showed violent behavior, and the condition of my children worried me. . I was afraid that the children's situation would get worse after the divorce".*

Re-opportunity category

Sometimes couples because of their interest in their life together; In order to preserve the foundation of the family and common life, they give themselves another chance to resolve the problems and repair the relationship. In this research, this issue can be described in the form of two main concepts: chance again and hope to restore the relationship.

1 -The concept of chance again: Some participants in the research cited giving themselves and their spouse another chance, making up for mistakes, or giving their spouse another chance as a reason to compromise and withdraw from divorce. For example, in confirmation of these concepts, couple 4 - the man says: "*I decided to give my wife and myself a chance, maybe we can fix our relationship." It was a risk, but I made this decision because of my daughter and the love I still had for my wife, and we tried to make up for both of our mistakes, and now I am satisfied that I gave ourselves this opportunity".*

2 -The concept of hoping to restore the relationship: Fixing one's faults, repairing the relationship and hoping for change with counseling were among the concepts that the participants

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who compromised; They mentioned it during the interview. As a couple, 6- the man comments on these concepts like this: "*It is true that we wanted to separate by agreement, but I had a little hope that the situation would be resolved in the divorce counseling sessions. After consultation, we decided to compromise. Of course, there were problems, some of which were related to me, such as anger, irritability, and pessimism; I tried to fix them. I don't say I succeeded 100%, but I worked a lot on myself and I feel that I have changed to some extent. My wife notices my change and helps me, so our relationship is better than before".*

Category of fear of loneliness and isolation

Many men and women experience intense fear and anxiety when they seriously decide to separate. This can be so annoying that it prevents you from doing your daily activities. The range of fear can be so wide, such as "fear of living alone, fear of being alone in the future and being away from family and parents" that a person prefers to stay in a relationship and avoid divorce. As an example, in confirming the concept of "fear of being alone in the future", couple 1-woman says: "*I am afraid of being alone. I am not used to being alone at all. When I wanted to separate, I was worried that I could not sleep at night. I constantly thought about this when my children are older. going and going after their own life and work, then what will become of me, what should I do, I will be alone, and I was afraid and apprehensive about these thoughts".*

The category of lack of supporter

Some couples, especially women, prefer to abandon the divorce and continue their life together, even though it is unpleasant, after the divorce due to "not having a supporter, not having a proper support, and not being supported by the family". Couple 5- Woman around These concepts express: "*My father died, I didn't have support, I didn't have anyone like my brother, uncle who wants to support me so that I can stand on my own feet. How could I rent a house and live alone, that's why I decided not to divorce and continue".*

The category of not making a final decision on divorce

This category includes the concept of real unwillingness to divorce with open codes "punishing the spouse by asking for divorce, scaring the spouse and being stubborn with the spouse". Sometimes the initial request for divorce by the couple or going to the court and applying for divorce is just to punish, scare and be stubborn with the spouse as a countermeasure to preserve and survive life. In support of the concept of "stubbornness with one's wife", couple 3- the woman

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says: "*My wife tormented me a lot with her actions and was not willing to correct her behavior at all. I also said that I would get a divorce because of stubbornness with my wife." My wife was against the divorce from the very beginning, but I insisted, I did not give up and I applied for a consensual divorce until the consultation. We reconciled when he promised to correct his behavior".*

Contextual conditions

There are a special set of general and environmental conditions that provide the background for the phenomenon and affect the strategies. In the current study, the categories of dependent personality, conflict with family, doubt and ambiguity in decision making were identified as the contextual conditions for compromise and withdrawal from divorce of couples.

Table 4. Concepts and categories related to contextual conditions

Central phenomenon (categories)	Open coding (discovering concepts)	
	Main concepts	Primary concepts (secondary codes)
Dependent Characteristic	Strong dependency	Low self-esteem and dependence on others, dependence on spouse, fear of losing spouse and children, worry about rejection by children, lack of self-confidence
Conflict with the original family	Lack of family support	Lack of sense of belonging to one's family, family indifference, broken family (child of divorce), rejection by the family, disagreement with the original family
Doubt and ambiguity in decision making	Emotional decision	Hasty decision, early emotional decision
	Hesitation in decision making	Having doubts, fear of making a wrong decision, indecisiveness in choosing the path of divorce, Be in a dilemma

The dependent personality category

Accepting the issue of separation is far from expected for people who have a dependent personality, have low self-confidence, or are worried about being rejected by their spouse and children. These people use all their ability to maintain their common life under any conditions. In this regard, regarding the concepts of "dependency on spouse" and "lack of self-confidence", couple 9-woman says: "*My wife and I got married at an old age and we do not have children." Both my parents are dead and I have only my wife and that's why I am very attached to her. I can't do many things properly, that's why my wife does most of the work and life responsibility. It's true that we have a little difference in terms of behavior and taste, but I got used to it and I can't part with it.*

Category of conflict with the original family

This category includes the main concept of lack of family support and companionship, with open codes "lack of sense of belonging to one's family, family indifference, broken family (child of

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divorce), worry of being rejected by the family, disagreement with the original family". In confirmation of the open code "worry about being rejected by family and friends" 7- The woman says: "*Our family is very religious and does not agree with divorce. This was my second marriage. I had lost contact with my family since my first divorce." My father was against my second marriage and somehow rejected me and didn't hear from me for years. With the mediation of my friends, I have been seeing my father for two years now. If I were to divorce for the second time, the same story would be repeated with more intensity".*

The category of doubt and ambiguity in decision making

Rapid and emotional decision, fear of making a mistake, doubt in decision making, indecisiveness and dead ends were some of the things that the participants mentioned in the interview. For example, couple 1- the woman says about these concepts: "*I was stuck in a strange dead end. I was worried, I was afraid that I had made a wrong decision and acted emotionally. I was afraid that I would regret it later and have no choice".*

Intervening conditions

These conditions affect causal conditions and reduce, intensify or change the occurrence of the phenomenon in some way. Based on the data obtained from the interviews, the categories of cultural and social issues, limited opportunities and lack of individual independence were identified as intervening conditions in this research.

Table 5. Concepts and categories related to intervening conditions

Central phenomenon (categories)	Open coding (discovering concepts)	
	Main concepts	Primary concepts (secondary codes)
Cultural and social issues	Community Relations	Being limited in society and family, life being difficult for divorced people, not having job security for divorced women, limiting family interactions.
	Cultural issues	Being judged by others (people's words), divorce being bad in culture and social stigma, blaming oneself, looking down on divorced women, not digesting divorce in the family, blaming the family and others.
Limitations/Opportunities	Not having the opportunity	Increasing age, time limit and repetition of past experience (in the second divorce), inability to have children, lack of opportunity for new marriage
Lack of individual independence	Loss of independence	Inability to live independently financially, lack of independence in choosing a place to live, being forced to live with parents, being controlled by parents

The category of cultural and social issues

This category includes the main concepts of social relations and cultural issues.

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1 -The concept of social relations: Some of the participating women gave up on their decision and chose a compromise due to being restricted in society and family, life being difficult for divorced people, lack of job security for divorced women, and family socializing being limited. For example, a 5-woman couple in the open source verification of "women's lack of job security" says, "*I work in a company, you know that you have to be careful in the work environment and in the private environment, no one should know that you are divorced or widowed. You should stay away from the bad eyes of men in the workplace. In short, it is very difficult for a divorced woman to work in a private environment, and I did not want this to happen to me and disturb my peace of mind".*

2 -The concept of cultural issues: Worrying about divorce and its effects, being judged, fear of reputation, the badness of divorce in culture and social stigma, blaming oneself, looking down on divorced women, indigestibility of divorce in the family and family, blaming the family and others, including cultural issues were raised by the participants. Couple 8- The woman says this about the concept of "bad view of divorced women": "*While I was living separately, people's behavior was not unaffected. When a few of the ladies in the neighborhood found out that I live alone and want to divorce my wife, their behavior towards me changed. Kurds didn't greet me very warmly anymore, they distanced themselves from me. There were other problems, for example, to find a job, when they asked about my marital status, I said that I was in the stage of separation, their behavior was different, you know what I mean. Generally, in our society, it is difficult for a widow or a divorced woman to live alone.*

The category of limitation of opportunities

Some of the participants considered the limitation of time and repeating the past experience (in the second divorce), the inability to have children, the lack of opportunity to remarry in terms of increasing age and having teenage and young children as a factor in compromising and continuing their life together. Couple 9- The man says about the concepts of "getting older" and "lack of opportunity to remarry": "*My wife and I got married at an old age and we didn't have children, which means we lost the opportunity to be parents." It's true that our relationship had some problems and now we are fixing them, anyway, we got used to each other and to each other's behavior. That we want to get a divorce and later start a life with a new person and start a new relationship; Of course, it is difficult for us to know that person, so it is better to maintain our relationship".*

The category of lack of individual independence

Some couples considered divorce and separation equal to losing their independence and individuality, lack of independence in choosing their place of residence, being forced to live with

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their parents and being controlled by their parents. Couple 4- The woman confirms the concepts of "forced to live with parents" and "being controlled by parents" as follows: "*If I got a divorce, I would have to go to the city to my mother and my brother, and there I would have to do everything they said for me." I did not have an independent life or to be able to work or make a decision for my future life. Now that I'm back, I'm at ease, at least I'm with my daughter and I'm in control of my life and I know what to do".*

Strategies (interaction strategies)

Strategies are specific actions or interactions that result from the central category. The strategies used by couples to reconcile and repair the relationship are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Concepts and categories related to strategies

Primary concepts (secondary codes)	Open coding (discovering concepts)	
	Main concepts	Primary concepts (secondary codes)
Effective strategies	Adaptive strategies	Co-thinking and participation in life affairs, using communication skills, aligning interests and desires, clearly expressing wishes and expectations, flexibility and tolerance, spending enough time with each other, having joint activities (exercise, walking, shopping, etc.)
	Compromise strategies	Considering each other's conditions and needs, reaching mutual understanding, expressing love verbally and non-verbally, rational conversation, reducing arguments and fights, dividing work and accepting roles, preserving life due to previous failure (previous divorce experience)
	self-management	Controlling emotions and emotions, controlling anger, participating in art and sports activities, having daily planning, acquiring self-awareness skills and paying attention to yourself.
	Professional advice and assistance	Helping to adapt and remove communication barriers, learning self-care and self-awareness training, using counseling and sex therapy services to solve sexual problems, correcting harmful behaviors (anger, humiliation, insult, blame, irresponsibility, etc.)
Ineffective strategies	Avoidance strategies	Withdrawal and little presence at home, silence and withdrawal, lack of consensus and participation, avoiding conversations about problems, being short due to fear of second divorce, not expressing expectations and desires.
	Destructive strategies	Lack of control of anger and aggressive behavior, arguments, inappropriate behavioral and verbal interactions in groups (party, group of friends, etc.), lack of protection of marital privacy (recounting problems to families and relatives), low sexual intercourse, Indifference and emotional isolation, lack of flexibility, cold and superficial relationship

Effective strategies

Effective strategies include adaptation strategies, compromise, self-management, and professional counseling and assistance.

1 -Adaptive strategies: like-mindedness and participation in life affairs, accepting roles and responsibilities, using communication skills, aligning interests and desires, clearly expressing

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desires and expectations, flexibility and tolerance, spending enough time with each other, having joint activities such as sports, walking, Shopping and... were among the adaptive strategies used by couples in this research. Confirming the concepts of "spending enough time with each other" and "having joint activities", the 9-man couple says: "*Now our relationship is much better because we spend more time together." Previously, I preferred to travel in a group with my family, which annoyed my wife, but now we have reduced the number of group trips and we mostly go on two trips, go for walks and shop together.*

2 -Compromise strategies: considering each other's conditions and needs, reaching mutual understanding, verbal and non-verbal expressions of affection, logical dialogue, reducing arguments and fights, dividing work and accepting roles, preserving life due to previous failure and the experience of divorce. Compromise strategies It was used by couples. In support of the concept of "division of work and acceptance of roles", the 7-woman couple says: "*Before, all the work at home and in the office was with me, I did all the work myself, and my wife was very careless and inattentive." With our advice, we were able to divide the tasks between us correctly so that I don't have too much pressure. The roles of each of us as men and women in life are clearly defined, we divided the work between us, I reduced my working hours, my wife works more hours in the office, and I also take care of the children and housework at home*. Or the 8-man couple who says about the concept of "preserving life due to previous failure (previous divorce experience)": "*I chose to reconcile because I didn't want to get divorced again and have my life fall apart for the second time".*

3 -Self-management: controlling emotions and emotions, controlling anger, participating in artistic and sports activities, having daily planning, acquiring self-awareness skills and paying attention to yourself were among the self-management strategies mentioned by the couples. Couple 9- The woman says about open code, "Having a daily schedule": "*My wife always complained about my laziness and coolness, but after counseling, I became much more motivated than before. I learned to plan for my work. This way, I make time for myself as well as for my work." I will get home."*

4-Professional counseling and help: Some participants in the research concepts such as "helping to adapt and remove communication barriers, learning self-care and self-awareness training, using counseling and sex therapy services to solve sexual problems, correcting harmful behaviors, learning skills and self-empowerment "in the form of professional advice and assistance strategy. Regarding the concept of "using counseling and sex therapy services", the 7-woman couple says: "*Before, I was not satisfied with sex with my wife, he had premature ejaculation, and he was not ready for*

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treatment all these years. After the divorce counseling sessions, we were introduced to a sex therapist." The counseling sessions are still going on and our problem has been solved to some extent.

Ineffective strategies

When the couple, despite their inner desire, refused to request a consensual divorce and decided to continue their marital relationship; In order to reduce the tension in the living space, they used ineffective strategies such as avoidance and destructive strategies, which in turn led to the aggravation of emotional divorce and the coldness of the couple's relationship.

1 -Avoidance strategies: Withdrawing and being less present at home, silence and withdrawal, lack of consensus and participation, avoiding conversations about problems, being short due to the fear of a second divorce, not expressing expectations and desires were among the avoidance strategies used by couples. Regarding the concept of "falling short due to the fear of second divorce", the 8-man couple says: "*I failed once in my first life, I was depressed for a long time, it took me a long time to recover." Even now, if I am short and tolerant, it is because I don't want to repeat the experience of divorce again".*

2-Destructive strategies: Lack of anger control and aggressive behavior, arguments, inappropriate behavioral and verbal interactions in groups (party, group of friends, etc.), lack of protection of marital privacy (recounting problems to families and relatives), communication low sex, weak emotional bond, indifference and emotional isolation, lack of flexibility, lack of marital intimacy and cold and shallow relationship are among the strategies used by couples who do not make an effort to improve their living conditions and re-enter emotional divorce in their life cycle. For example, couple 2- the man commented on the concepts of "indifference and emotional isolation" and "cold and superficial relationship" as follows: "*I became cold towards him, I don't talk much at home, I'm mostly in my own place." We are not like other couples; we are just living together like two housemates. We don't have a warm and intimate relationship, we seem to have reconciled, but we have an emotional divorce, mostly for my son's sake, I agreed to continue.*

Consequences

In this research, the results were classified into two categories: satisfaction with life together and dissatisfaction with life together.

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Table 7. Concepts and categories related to consequences

Central phenomenon (categories)	Open coding (discovering concepts)	
	Main concepts	Primary concepts (secondary codes)
Satisfaction with the continuation of life together	Satisfaction with the conciliation decision	The peace of the home environment and the improvement of the conditions, hope to continue living together, being pleased with the way of changes
	Forming positive interactions	and quality of life
Dissatisfaction with life together	Lack of emotional interaction	Mutual understanding and respect, actively listening to the spouse's words, being honest
	Dissatisfaction with the quality of life after compromise	Coldness in relationships and indifference, loss of intimacy, sexual dissatisfaction

The category of satisfaction with the continuation of life together

1 -The concept of satisfaction with the compromise decision: The peace of the home environment and the improvement of conditions, hope to continue living together, being satisfied with the way of changes and the quality of life are the consequences of using efficient solutions. The 4-female couple affirming the concept of "being satisfied with the changes and the quality of life" says: "*I am very happy that I returned to my life and did not get a divorce." My husband and I tried to forget the past events. Don't argue and trust me. It was very difficult, but we started all over again. Now our living conditions have improved a lot. I am very hopeful and motivated for the future".*

2 -The concept of forming positive interactions: Mutual understanding and respect, actively listening to the spouse's words, being honest; Positive and logical interactions are the result of couples. The 9-woman couple commented on the concept of "mutual understanding and mutual respect" as follows: "*We learned and practiced to understand each other, consider each other's conditions, and respect each other." Let's not humiliate and blame each other in front of family and others, and be careful of our privacy and be compatible with each other.*

The category of not being satisfied with the continuation of the shared life

1 -The concept of lack of emotional interaction: Coldness in relationships and indifference, loss of intimacy, sexual dissatisfaction is the result of using ineffective strategies by couples. Couple 2-woman confirms the concept of "sexual dissatisfaction" and says: "Our sexual relationship is very, very little. I had genital warts *from my wife before." I don't have a good feeling about sex with my wife, she also knows that I don't want sex and doesn't ask for much".*

2- The concept of dissatisfaction with the quality of life after reconciliation: Decrease in self-confidence, self-blame, lack of hope for the future and improvement of conditions, weak emotional bond in some couples; It is a reason for feeling unsatisfied with the quality of life after compromise

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and withdrawal from divorce. Couple 2- the woman confirms the concept of "lack of hope for the future and improvement of conditions" and "weak emotional bond" and says: "*We don't have much to do with each other anymore, we mostly talk about our daily work or our son and his school." I have no hope of continuing this relationship, but due to my son's condition, I have to continue for now so that in the future, when my son is older, I can learn a profession and become independent." Also, regarding the "weak emotional bond" of the 8-woman couple, he says: "I have already said that I have become cold towards my wife and our emotional relationship is not as it was in the beginning of our life, it has faded, of course, I don't know, maybe later on, our relationship will improve."*

Discussion

The aim of this study was to ascertain the reasons behind the decision to compromise and retract a divorce application among couples seeking consensual divorce. Couples who initially opted for separation due to issues like infidelity, irresponsibility, insult, and emotional detachment ultimately reconsidered their decision during mandatory divorce counseling sessions, reaching a compromise. Through acknowledging marital challenges and demonstrating cooperation, patience, and empathy, these couples managed to surmount obstacles and persist in their shared life. This discovery aligns with the findings of Jomehpour and Mahmoodpour (2017), suggesting that individuals high in empathy exhibit positive emotions and constructive social interactions. Moreover, it corresponds with the outcomes of Nasrollahi and Tamdoani's study (2017), indicating that a thorough comprehension of marital issues, coupled with suitable counseling interventions, can enhance married life.

Certain couples endeavored to lead a tranquil and harmonious life by maintaining confidentiality, accepting their partner's flaws openly, and thereby fostering trust and stability in their relationship. Through mutual trust, they abstained from blame and humiliation, opting instead to avert conflicts and tensions within their household. Ultimately, they found contentment in the changes experienced. This observation resonates with Hatefirad et al.'s investigation (2022) on conflict and tension management within families for enhancing couple relations, as well as with Arami et al.'s research (2023) on cultivating trust between partners. Their studies underscored the significance of trust in preventing family disintegration, emphasizing the necessity for mutual trust-building efforts by married men and women to safeguard their marital bond.

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The contextual circumstances, encompassing dependent personality traits, familial discord, and decision-making hesitancy and ambiguity, were posited as underlying factors influencing couples' decisions to compromise and retract divorce petitions. The study's findings on individuals with dependent personalities, choosing to forego divorce due to diminished self-worth and confidence, in favor of compromise and continued cohabitation, align with the research outcomes of Dailey et al. (2023), Cope and Mattingly (2021), and Civilotti et al. (2021). Conversely, other research findings concerning conflicts within the extended family, decision-making uncertainties, and apprehensions about making and regretting incorrect choices in the future resonate with the conclusions drawn by Allen and Hawkins (2017), Doherty et al. (2016, 2021), Crabtree and Harris (2020), Jacobsen (2021), and Galovan et al. (2022) on the ambivalence and reluctance surrounding divorce decisions, leading to eventual refusal.

Based on the accounts provided by the participants in the study, the categories of cultural and social issues, limited opportunities, and lack of individual autonomy were identified as intervening factors impacting the processes and tactics. Put differently, these factors either enable or constrain strategies within a specific context.

Couples who opt for compromise due to external pressures rather than genuine willingness not only fail to actively seek improvements but also resort to ineffective approaches like avoidance and destructive behaviors. The study findings indicate that such couples employ avoidance tactics such as silence, withdrawal, non-engagement, and conformity in decision-making to maintain a peaceful atmosphere in their lives. They tend to evade discussions about issues and suppress their desires and expectations. Additionally, some resort to destructive behaviors including arguments, inappropriate actions and words, poor sexual communication, apathy, emotional detachment, lack of anger management, rigidity, and superficial relationships. The results of this research on ineffective strategies somewhat align with those of Salimi et al.'s (2020) study.

Upon addressing the main and sub-questions of the research, a query arises regarding the paradigm model emerging from the current study's findings on the reasons behind compromise and avoidance of divorce.

Couples adopt various approaches to sustain their marital relationships. While some achieve compromise and enhance satisfaction by collaborating and trusting each other, others resort to divorce without reaching a mutual agreement through avoidance tactics. Compulsory counseling

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for divorce can aid in mitigating marital conflicts and restoring relationships. Couples benefiting from counseling and acquiring interpersonal skills tend to be more content in their shared life. Conversely, couples who remain dissatisfied and encounter potential issues resort to silence and isolation instead of compromise. The study underscores the diverse methods employed to sustain marital relationships, highlighting that compromise does not universally lead to improvements for all couples. Future research should explore the reasons behind compromise and divorce avoidance across different regions, considering the impact of subcultures and religions, while ensuring questionnaire validity and reliability. Furthermore, investigating the factors influencing compromise and divorce avoidance among middle-aged individuals is crucial.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of Islamic Azad University- Central Tehran Branch and with the code of ethics IR.IAU.CTB.REC.1402.059.. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. The author contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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