

An Analysis of the Meaning of Divorce Lawsuits by High-Income Women at the Sidoarjo Religious Court

Amelinda Devina Isdiany, Arief Sudrajat

Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Surabaya State University

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ABSTRACT

The increase in the number of divorce cases filed by high-income women indicates a significant change in gender relations and the meaning of marriage in modern society. This phenomenon is clearly evident in the Sidoarjo Religious Court, where the majority of divorce cases are filed by wives who are economically independent. This study aims to analyze the factors causing divorce and its meaning for high-income women in social, legal, and gender contexts. This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach. Data collection was conducted through in depth interviews, observation, and documentation of women filing for divorce at the Sidoarjo Religious Court. Data analysis was conducted descriptively using George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism theory to understand divorce lawsuits as social actions shaped through interaction and meaning making processes. The results show that divorce lawsuits are influenced by accumulated domestic conflicts, gender inequality, verbal abuse, infidelity, and the husband's failure to fulfill material and emotional obligations. Economic independence gives women a stronger bargaining position to evaluate and end marriages that are considered unfair. Divorce suits are interpreted as a form of agency, symbolic resistance to unequal relationships, and an effort to maintain dignity and personal well being.

ABSTRAK

Meningkatnya jumlah kasus perceraian yang diajukan oleh perempuan berpenghasilan tinggi menunjukkan perubahan signifikan dalam hubungan gender dan makna perkawinan dalam masyarakat modern. Fenomena ini jelas terlihat di Pengadilan Agama Sidoarjo, di mana mayoritas kasus perceraian diajukan oleh istri yang mandiri secara ekonomi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis faktor-faktor penyebab perceraian dan maknanya bagi perempuan berpenghasilan tinggi dalam konteks sosial, hukum, dan gender. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi perempuan yang mengajukan perceraian di Pengadilan Agama Sidoarjo. Analisis data dilakukan secara deskriptif menggunakan teori interaksionisme simbolik George Herbert Mead untuk memahami gugatan perceraian sebagai tindakan sosial yang dibentuk melalui proses interaksi dan pembentukan makna. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa gugatan perceraian dipengaruhi oleh akumulasi konflik domestik, ketidaksetaraan gender, kekerasan verbal, perselingkuhan, dan kegagalan suami untuk memenuhi kewajiban materi dan emosional. Kemandirian ekonomi memberi perempuan posisi tawar yang lebih kuat untuk mengevaluasi dan mengakhiri perkawinan yang dianggap tidak adil. Gugatan cerai ditafsirkan sebagai bentuk pemberdayaan diri, perlawanan simbolis terhadap hubungan yang tidak setara, dan upaya untuk mempertahankan martabat dan kesejahteraan pribadi.

INTRODUCTION

Rapid social development in recent decades has brought significant changes to the role of women in society. Women are no longer positioned solely as housewives, but also as economic actors who play an active role in the world of work. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2021) shows that the female labor force participation rate in Indonesia continues to increase. This change has not only impacted the economic structure of families, but also influenced the dynamics of gender relations and power relations within households. One of the social implications of this change is an increase in divorce suits filed by women, especially high-income

*Corresponding Author

Email: amelindadevina.22018@mhs.unesa.ac.id

women. The phenomenon of divorce suits filed by women reflects a shift in the meaning of marriage in modern society. Giddens (1992) states that modernity encourages individuals to have greater autonomy in determining their own destiny, including in intimate relationships. In this context, women who are in unsatisfactory, conflict-ridden, or emotionally and structurally oppressive marriages are more likely to decide to end their marriages. Divorce is no longer seen as taboo, but rather as a rational choice to escape from relationships that are considered unhealthy.

Divorce is the termination of a marriage decided by a court based on certain grounds as stipulated in Law Number 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage. Divorce generally occurs as a result of prolonged conflict, disputes, domestic violence, economic problems, or incompatibility between spouses. Although domestic quarrels are normal, unresolved conflicts can develop into the main reason for divorce. For some individuals, divorce is seen as the last resort to resolve problems that can no longer be tolerated. Data shows that the divorce rate in Indonesia has increased in recent years. According to Statistics Indonesia, in 2022 there were 516,334 divorce cases, an increase of 15.31% compared to the previous year. Of these, the majority of divorces were filed by wives, amounting to 388,358 cases or around 75.21% of the total divorces. The main factors causing divorce were disputes and arguments, which accounted for more than 63% of cases, followed by economic problems, domestic violence, and polygamy. This data shows a significant change in the social and cultural dynamics of Indonesian society regarding the institution of marriage.

A similar phenomenon can also be seen at the regional level, particularly in East Java. Based on data from the East Java Central Statistics Agency, in 2022 there were 79,810 divorce cases, which continued to increase in the following years. The regencies and cities with the highest divorce rates include Malang Regency, Surabaya City, Banyuwangi Regency, Jember, Kediri, and Sidoarjo. Sidoarjo Regency shows a fairly consistent pattern of divorce filed by women from year to year, making it a representative area for research. Data from the Sidoarjo Religious Court shows that divorce petitions filed by women reached 3,057 cases in 2022, increasing to 3,272 cases in 2024. The increase in divorce petitions filed by women cannot be separated from changes in economic power relations within the household. Women who have financial independence tend to have a stronger bargaining position in marital relationships. However, economic independence does not necessarily eliminate gender inequality. In many cases, women still face symbolic domination, emotional control, and traditional role expectations even though they contribute significantly to the family economy. It is this imbalance that often triggers conflict and pushes women to take legal action through divorce suits.

The meaning of divorce for high income women has complex symbolic and social dimensions. Divorce is not only interpreted as the end of a marriage, but also as a form of affirmation of self-authority, an expression of dissatisfaction with gender inequality, and an attempt to free oneself from emotionally and psychologically damaging relationships. With a relatively strong economic position, women have more room to renegotiate their identity and role in marriage. Previous studies have generally focused on the causes of divorce or its impact on the family economy, without exploring the subjective meaning felt by women as plaintiffs. Several studies show that high-income women tend to file for divorce due to economic factors and unfairness in the division of domestic roles. However, studies that specifically examine how women interpret these decisions in the context of social and gender relations are still limited.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method with a descriptive case study approach to gain an in depth understanding of the perceptions, views, and subjective meanings constructed by high income women regarding divorce lawsuits in the context of their social lives. The research was conducted at the Sidoarjo Religious Court, which was chosen because of the high number of divorce suits filed by women, using data collection techniques such as observation, semi structured in depth interviews, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted using qualitative descriptive methods through the stages of data reduction, presentation, and verification. The analytical framework used George Herbert Mead's Symbolic Interactionism Theory to understand divorce lawsuits as social actions formed through symbolic interaction processes, gender role meanings, power relations, and the formation of women's self concepts in domestic life.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Factors Causing Divorce Lawsuits by High Income Women

The results of the study show that divorce lawsuits filed by high income women in the Sidoarjo Religious Court did not arise suddenly, but were the accumulation of various structural and personal factors that had been going on for a long time. These factors include gender inequality in the household, prolonged conflict, communication breakdown, infidelity, verbal abuse, and the husband's failure to fulfill his material and emotional obligations. Contrary to the normative construct that places women as the party who must persevere for the sake of household integrity, high income women in this study demonstrate a stronger bargaining position.

Economic independence allows them to reassess their marital relationships more rationally and reflectively. Divorce suits are understood not as emotional acts, but as conscious decisions after various attempts to maintain the household no longer provide a sense of security and justice. In the context of religious law, the Sidoarjo Religious Court serves as an institutional arena that provides a legal space for women to renegotiate their position in marital relationships. Thus, the factors leading to divorce suits cannot be understood solely as domestic issues, but are also related to changes in women's legal, social, and gender awareness.

In addition, the results of this study also show a change in the meaning of marriage for women with high incomes. Marriage is no longer seen only as a social obligation or an institution that must be maintained under all circumstances, but rather as a relationship that prioritizes equality, respect, and the fulfillment of women's basic rights. When such relationships do not reflect the principles of justice and balance of roles, divorce is seen as a form of independence for women in taking control of their personal lives. Thus, divorce not only reflects the failure of a marriage, but also becomes an expression of women's critical awareness of their rights, dignity, and social position in the context of family and society.

The Meaning of Divorce Lawsuits as a Form of Resistance to Gender Inequality

Divorce lawsuits filed by high-income women are interpreted as a form of symbolic resistance to gender inequality, which has long been legitimized in domestic relationships. This inequality is reflected in the unequal division of roles, the husband's dominance in decision making, and the normalization of the double burden that women must bear even though they make a significant economic contribution. From a symbolic interactionism perspective, the meaning of divorce suits is formed through the continuous social interactions experienced by women, both within the household and in the wider social sphere.

When these experiences of injustice are repeated and do not receive an equal response, women begin to reconstruct the meaning of marriage and their role in it. Divorce then becomes a symbol of rejection of unequal relationships that no longer provide space for women's self actualization. Thus, divorce is not merely interpreted as a failure of women to maintain their households, but as an expression of critical awareness of unequal gender relations. This shows a shift in the meaning of divorce from social stigma to a form of affirmation of women's rights and dignity.

In addition, the process of filing for divorce can also be understood as a result of meanings that exist within the legal and social spheres. Women's interactions with legal institutions, courts, and social narratives about rights and justice contribute to strengthening their courage to make the decision to divorce. In this context, religious courts not only function as a space for resolving legal conflicts, but also as a symbolic sphere that accepts the experiences of injustice experienced by women. With this recognition, the decision to divorce takes on a new meaning as a morally and socially legitimate act, while also reinforcing the position of women as active subjects who are able to redefine marital relationships based on the principles of gender equality and justice.

The Meaning of Divorce Lawsuits for High Income Women

For high income women, divorce lawsuits have complex and multidimensional meanings. Divorce is not only understood as the end of a marriage, but also as a process of liberation from relationships that limit movement, emotions, and self identity. In this study, informants interpreted divorce as a step to maintain mental health, self esteem, and the stability of their children's lives. This meaning was formed through long reflection on the experience of married life that did not meet the initial expectations of marriage. Women no longer interpret the status of "wife" as the main identity that must be maintained at the expense of themselves. Instead, they see themselves as autonomous subjects who have the right to determine the direction of their own lives. In a social and legal context, the meaning of divorce is also related to women's courage to challenge patriarchal norms that place women as passive and dependent parties. Divorce represents a change in women's perspectives of themselves and the institution of marriage.

In addition to being a process of liberation, divorce suits also serve as a consideration for marriage. High-income women in this study assessed marriage not solely based on the continuity of formal status, but on the extent to which the relationship was able to provide a safe space, mutual respect, and role equity. When the relationship becomes a source of psychological pressure and inequality, the decision to divorce is seen as a step to restore balance in life. On the other hand, the decision to divorce is also related to social interactions that shape how women interpret life after divorce. Divorce is no longer seen as a sign of moral or social failure, but as a first step towards a more independent and dignified life. This change in perspective shows a shift in the meaning of divorce in women's consciousness, from what was previously considered an inability to maintain a household, to a symbol of courage, decision-making ability, and control over one's personal life.

Analysis of the Meaning of Economic Independence as a Symbol of New Power for Women

Economic independence is a key factor that influences how women interpret divorce suits. A stable income provides a sense of security and confidence to make big decisions without financial dependence on their husbands. In this study, economic independence is interpreted as a symbol of new power that allows women to have control over their own lives. Within the framework of symbolic interactionism, income is understood not only as a material resource, but also as a symbol of capacity, competence, and autonomy. When women have economic

resources, their position in domestic relationships shifts. The imbalance of power that was previously accepted as “normal” begins to be questioned. However, the findings also show that economic independence does not necessarily eliminate domestic conflict. In fact, in some cases, women's independence triggers resistance from husbands who feel they have lost their authority.

This reinforces the argument that divorce suits are not only influenced by economic factors, but also by the negotiation of the meaning of power and gender roles in the household. In this context, economic independence helps women view marriage more realistically. They no longer stay solely for economic reasons, but assess whether the relationship still provides security, mutual respect, and fairness. When marriage becomes a source of pressure and inequality, the decision to file for divorce is understood as an effort to protect one's well-being and the future of one's children. Thus, economic independence not only provides financial capability, but also strengthens women's courage to make decisions that are considered best for their lives.

Analysis of the Meaning of Domestic Conflict: Infidelity, Verbal Abuse, and Lack of Financial Support

Domestic conflict is the main reason that drives women to file for divorce. Infidelity, verbal abuse, and lack of financial and emotional support are interpreted as a form of betrayal of the marriage commitment. These conflicts do not exist in isolation, but are interrelated and form a layered experience of injustice. In daily interactions, women interpret these conflicts as signs of the collapse of a healthy and equal relationship. Verbal abuse, although often considered “not physical abuse,” has a profound psychological impact and is a strong reason for women to end their marriages. The lack of financial support is also interpreted not only as an economic problem, but as a symbol of irresponsibility and the absence of the husband's role. Through this process of interpretation, divorce suits are understood as a mechanism to stop the cycle of repetitive and destructive conflict.

The decision to divorce is the result of a rational evaluation of household conditions that are deemed no longer worth maintaining. In many cases, recurring conflicts leave women feeling emotionally exhausted and losing hope for change in their marriage. Efforts to improve the relationship, such as communicating or being patient, often do not work. When conflicts become more intense and unresolved, women begin to see divorce as the most reasonable way out to protect themselves and their children from prolonged psychological effects. Thus, filing for divorce is seen as a conscious decision to end a relationship that is no longer healthy and full of conflict.

Analysis of the Meaning of Divorce Lawsuits in the Framework of George Herbert Mead's Symbolic Interactionism

In George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism perspective, divorce lawsuits are understood as social actions that arise from the process of meaning making through symbolic interaction. The concepts of mind, self, and society are key to understanding how women build self-awareness and make the decision to file for divorce. Through interactions with their husbands, families, legal authorities, and social environments, women internalize various symbols and values that then shape their concept of self. When the meaning of marriage is no longer in line with the values of justice and personal well being, women engage in self reflection (I) on social expectations (Me). Filing for divorce becomes a conscious act that represents a negotiation between the self and the social structure. Thus, divorce cannot be understood as a purely individual act, but rather as a product of complex social interactions between women, religious norms, the law, and patriarchal structures.

The framework of symbolic interactionism allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning of divorce as a meaningful and contextual social act. Using this perspective, women's decisions to file for divorce can be understood as the result of an ongoing process of reflection and self assessment. Women do not immediately decide to divorce, but rather go through a process of considering their daily experiences, environmental responses, and the impact of such a decision on themselves and their children. When the role of wife no longer provides positive meaning in their lives, filing for divorce is chosen as the most reasonable and responsible course of action. This shows that divorce is a carefully considered social decision, not a spontaneous or emotional act.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that divorce suits filed by high-income women in the Sidoarjo Religious Court are social actions that arise from a long process of reflection and interpretation of experiences of injustice in the household. Divorce suits are not triggered by a single factor, but rather by an accumulation of domestic conflicts, gender inequality, and the husband's failure to fulfill his role. Economic independence strengthens women's position in negotiating marital relations and encourages them to take legal action. From a symbolic interactionism perspective, divorce is interpreted not as a failure of women, but as an expression of critical awareness, agency, and efforts to maintain self dignity. Thus, divorce suits reflect changes in women's perspectives on marriage, themselves, and gender relations in a broader social and legal context.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the results of this study, future research is recommended to expand the scope of analysis by involving different research locations, social backgrounds, and research approaches in order to obtain a broader understanding of divorce lawsuits filed by women. Further studies may also explore the role of legal institutions, mediation processes, and social environments in shaping women's decisions to file for divorce. Several obstacles that may influence research results include limited access to informants, social stigma surrounding divorce, and cultural norms that still normalize gender inequality, which may affect the openness of participants during the research process.

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