Total Divorce Rate in Israel

Shlomo Nahir- Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel

1. Introduction

In Israel, there is considerable interest in examining the chances that a marriage will end in divorce. This interest is expressed in the media, by researchers, and by inquiries to the Information Center of the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics. ICBS publications and various research studies dealing with the factors that affect divorce provide extensive information on the prevalence of divorce, divorce rates in Israel, and analyses of various characteristics of couples that affect the chances of a marriage to end in divorce. However, these publications have not provided an answer to the question: What are the chances that a marriage will ever end in divorce? Lacking this data, many people think that dividing the number of divorces in a particular year by the number of marriages in that year provides an estimate of the chances of a marriage to end in divorce. This calculation leads to the conclusion that "one couple in every three gets divorced."

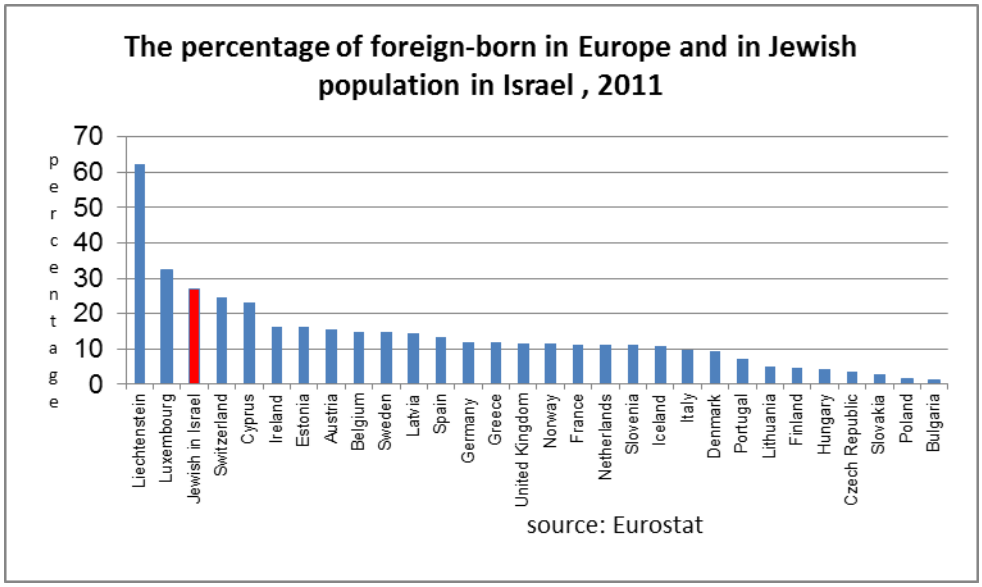
The purpose of this paper is to examine the possibility of calculating a period rate to answer the question: What are the chances that a marriage will ever end in divorce? In addition, we will study whether this rate can be calculated for different religions, different population groups in society (for example, among the ultra-Orthodox or among different ethnic groups).

2. Statistical Analysis of the Divorce Rate in Europe

As part of a project to map European divorce indicators (Simo, Spijker, & Solsona, 2009), a Total Divorce Rate was presented. This rate is calculated by adding the divorce rates by duration of marriage for a particular divorce year. For example, to calculate this rate for the year 2000, the proportion of marriages that dissolved in the year 2000 after 50 years of marriage (marriage cohort 1950) are added to the proportion of dissolved marriages after 49 years of marriage (marriage cohort 1951), etc. The total divorce rate is then obtained by summing these proportions. It should be noted that this method ignores divorces that occurred after more than 50 years of marriage, under the assumption that this share is negligible. Also ignored is the relative size of each marriage cohort. It should also be noted that migration and mortality among members of the marriage cohorts are ignored. The formula for calculating the total divorce rate is as follows: (Spijker, J, (2013).

$$\sum_{<t..50}^{t} \frac{\text{Number of divorces by marriage duration t and divorce year x + t}}{\text{Number of marriages by year x}}$$

According to Simo, Spijker, & Solsona, the total divorce rate in Europe rose from 12% in 1970 to 35% in 2003. Below are the rates for selected European countries in 2003 (Eurostat, 2006).



The total divorce rate in Europe is slightly biased downward because it does not take into account emigration and mortality of the couples who married. On the other hand, it is biased upward because it does not take into account immigration of married couples. It should be noted that the reason that the rate is based on dividing the number of people who divorced by the initial number of persons who married in each marriage cohort, and not by the number of marriages that survived is that in most of the countries, the number of marriages that survived is unknown (Eurostat, 2003).

3. Special Problems in Calculating the Total Divorce Rate for Jews in Israel

The Jewish and Moslem populations in Israel have completely different demographic characteristics. For example, in 2011, the Moslem population's crude divorce rate was 1.3 per thousand whereas the rate among the Jewish population was 1.8 per thousand. Therefore, the correct methodology is to calculate total divorce rates separately for the two populations. But even when calculating separately, there are several problems that make it difficult to calculate the total divorce rate for Israel's Jewish population:

- In Europe, when calculating the divorce rate, mortality and emigration (which bias the rate downward) are ignored. On the other hand, immigration (which biases the rate upward) is also ignored. Because Israel is open to unlimited immigration of Jews, immigration cannot be ignored. For example, in 2011, persons born abroad constituted 27% of Israel's Jewish population. In contrast, in Europe in that year, persons born in other countries constituted 9.7% of the population of countries in the European Union. The percentage born in other countries was larger than that of Israel's Jewish population in only two very small countries (Lichtenstein, 62% born abroad, and Luxembourg, 32% born abroad) (Eurostat, 2015). In light of this, it can be concluded that when calculating the total divorce rate among Jews in Israel, in contrast to Europe, the divorces of immigrants should not be included.

- In Israel, there exists a unique phenomenon of residents who travel abroad in order to marry. This occurs because according to Israeli law, civil marriage cannot be performed. Yet, a Jewish couple who marries abroad in a civil ceremony and wishes to divorce must obtain a religious divorce in Israel. Therefore, in order to avoid upward bias in the total divorce rate, the calculation of the rate must include only Jewish divorced couples who married in Israel.

4. Calculation of the Total Divorce Rate for Israel's Jewish Population

To calculate the total divorce rate for Israel's Jewish population, a summation was made of the proportion of divorces in each marriage year out of the total couples who married in Israel in that year, not including divorces of immigrants who married before they came to Israel, and not including divorces of Israeli residents who married outside of Israel. The obtained result is slightly biased downward, because it is not possible to locate the divorces of couples who married in Israel, emigrated, and did not report their divorce to Israel's Population Authority.

Calculation of the total divorce rate of Israel's Arab population was performed more simply than the calculation for the Jewish population, for the following reasons:

1. The influence of non-inclusion of divorces of couples who married abroad is trivial, because such cases are rare.

2. There is no need to exclude immigrants who married abroad before immigrating, because immigration to Israel among the Arab population is miniscule.

Summary of Results

The results showed that the total divorce rate in Israel was between 26%-27% for the years 2006-2011, compared to 35% in the EU (for the year 2003). However, it should be noted that the rates in Europe may be biased up or down. Conversely, the rate in Israel is only slightly biased down, since the calculation included marriages of Israel residents who emigrated and divorced abroad (but did not report the divorce to the Population Authority), but excluded married couples who immigrated and divorced in Israel.

The total divorce rate in Israel for specific groups such as the ultra-Orthodox or specific ethnic groups could not be calculated because there is no historic data of the size of marriage cohorts by specific groups.

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