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**Survey of Orthodox Jewish Divorce, Its Causes, and Factors Leading to Successful Marriages**  
(Report available at <http://nishmaresearch.com/social-research.html>)

**GENERALLY BAD *MIDDOT* (BEHAVIORS) AND UNTREATED OR UNDISCLOSED MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES OR PERSONALITY DISORDERS CITED AS TOP TWO LEADING CAUSES OF DIVORCE**

A new Nishma Research survey of 1,736 Orthodox Jews (both Modern Orthodox and Haredi), which includes 351 divorcees (the largest survey ever done among this group) sheds light on the factors that lead to marital failure and those that lead to success.

(This study also probed responses from those who were married and never divorced, to identify the reasons for their marital success; divorcees who successfully remarried offer thoughts on their “remarrying process”; and single individuals discuss whether divorces make them anxious and whether they are trying to ensure a “divorce-proof” marriage.)

**Among the key findings relating to the causes of divorce:**

- At the time of divorce, the average Modern Orthodox couple had been married 16 years, while the average Haredi couple had been married 11 years. About 80% had children.
- “Untreated or undisclosed mental health challenges or personality disorders” was the top-named reason among Modern Orthodox (40% said it was a “major reason”) and was cited even more often by the Haredim (51%). Also cited as major reasons were generally bad *middot* (behaviors), emotional and verbal abuse, and dishonesty.
- Other prominent reasons were a spouse having “become a different person,” cited by 38% of Haredim and 32% of Modern Orthodox, and the couple being “mismatched from the start” (about one in five among both groups).
- Surprisingly, addiction problems were cited more often by Haredim (22%) than by Modern Orthodox (11%).
- Nishma president Mark Trencher noted, “the reasons Orthodox Jews give for their divorces do in many cases parallel what has been observed in U.S. society, but there are interesting differences. For example, when we talk about ‘undisclosed’ mental health challenges, do these pop up as a surprise among the Orthodox more often than in secular society? If so, might this be due to the Orthodox community’s *shidduch* (matchmaking) system, and limited pre-marriage dating, resulting in less intimate knowledge of the partner?”
- He added, “Other studies have noted that Orthodox Jews look for spouses who have comparable religious observances and worldviews; and yet there is much religious transitioning in the community, with a majority saying they have become more or less religiously observant over time. Are growing religious mismatches spurring divorce?”
- Finally, “while this study did not measure the incidence of divorce, it is clearly far below what we see in secular society, where studies have shown that about 40% of first marriages end in divorce. And, while there is still some stigma, that too is receding somewhat.”
- Focusing on the Orthodox community, the study probed whether Orthodox Jewish life (practices, halacha, community, etc.) had an impact on divorces (where a plurality says it made their marriage less stable), as well as on successful marriages (where a strong majority says it has made their marriage more stable).
- In the end, while many more divorces are described as “hostile” (47%) than as “friendly” (28%), a substantial majority across all of Orthodoxy (76%) strongly agree that it was good that they got divorced.

In addition to the quantitative data, the study contains and synthesizes many verbatim responses from divorcees and marrieds.

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