



RESEARCH PAPER

Post- Divorce Issues and Challenges: A Phenomenological Study of Divorced Mothers from District Sialkot, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Divorce is on the rise as a prominent social issue within contemporary societies and the term “Talaq” has been linked with a strong social taboo in Pakistani culture. The present research article investigates “The Post-divorce Issues and Challenges of Divorced Mothers from District Sialkot, Pakistan”. A qualitative phenomenological research design was used to explore the firsthand experiences of the divorced mothers. Purposive sampling was employed to recruit seven divorced mothers as study participants. The data was later analyzed thematically and for enhancing the methodological and analytical processes labelling theory was also employed. The findings revealed that during the post-divorce period, divorced mothers demonstrated a high level of distress in providing the right place to their children in society. Considering the challenges encountered by divorced mothers, this study will be an effort to investigate the socioeconomic difficulties experienced by divorced mothers while socializing and meeting the financial needs of their children.

KEYWORDS

Children’s upbringing, Divorced mothers, Lived experiences, Stigma

Introduction

Divorce is not an uncommon phenomenon and it has been experienced by the couples from every social, political, economic, religious and ethnic background in human history. In wide-ranging terms, it has been considered as “the ending of a matrimonial” (Qureshi, 2012). In relations, a separation has undoubtedly the greatest terrible condition for an individual that results in an emotional hindrance. (Jaime E. Mendoza, 2020) shown in their research that a significant number of women who had undergone divorce encountered symptoms of depression, feelings of worthlessness and anxiety. Furthermore, a considerable number of women relied on the use of antidepressants. Dissolution of marriage has been a great concern around the globe. The breakdown of the family structure and busy modern-day life is occurring rapidly and raising concerns globally. According to the statistics by The Office for National Statistics (2021) UK census, the average divorce rate in UK is 42% which means nearly half of the marriages in UK end in separation. A 9.6% increase in divorce rate in UK and Wales recorded as compared with 2020. According to the data from United Nations, the country with the highest divorce rate in 2020 was Maldives. During that year Maldives reported 2,984 divorces among its population of 540,544 leading to a divorce rate of 5.52 per thousand individuals. In 2020, Kazakhstan, a former Soviet republic, faced the world’s second highest divorce rate, standing at 4.6 divorces per 1,000 individuals. Following closely behind are Russia (3.9), Belgium (3.7) and Belarus (3.7). United States shares 9th to 12th position with an annual

divorce rate of 2.7 per 1,000 people. Notably, Nevada holds the highest divorce rate among all U.S. states at 14%. In Pakistan, wide-ranging occurrence rates of divorce had been stated through people perceptions polls and the newspapers.

Based on a survey conducted by (Gallup & Gilani, 2019), a significant 58% of the Pakistani population at that time held the belief that divorce rates within Pakistan had risen. Furthermore, the survey revealed that 40% of the respondents attributed most of these divorces to the involvement of the couple's in-laws. As per police records, during the initial quarter of 2020, a total of 3,800 divorce cases were registered in Karachi. More recently, between January and November 2021, the District Judiciary of Rawalpindi recorded a total of 10,312 cases related to divorce, khula, guardianship and maintenance. Additionally, 13,000 cases were identified pending adjudication in family courts within the same district (The News International, December 09, 2021). In the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the psycho-social factors of divorce, for instance, psychological, physical, and emotive ferocity hit females hardened than males in society (Waseem, 2020). In Pakistan, marriage and divorce are subjected to societal and institutional influence and involvement (Gul, et al., 2019).

Pakistan is an Islamic state and marriage is a beautiful and sacred union between man and woman in Islam. In the Sahih ul-Jaami Hadith, Anas bin Malik, a companion of prophet Muhammad, relayed a saying of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH): "A man to whom Allah grants a righteous spouse receives assistance in half of his faith, so he should be mindful of Allah concerning the remaining half." Therefore, divorce is an act which is allowed but not something encouraged in Islam. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) expressed that among all the permissible actions, divorce is the one most disliked by Allah. The Quran also stresses, "Live with your wives with kindness and fairness. Even if you may have some dislikes, it is possible that Allah has placed significant good in them." Muslims generally consider divorce as a last resort, and many seek counseling and substantial support to prevent it. Family works as primary unit for the upbringing and socialization of the children in Pakistani society. In the socio-cultural context of Pakistan, despite numerous socio-economic changes witnessed during 21st century, traditional norms continue to dominate and process of adapting to life after divorce pose significant challenges for women (Ahmed, et al 2015; Qamar & Faizan, 2021). The primary objective of this research was to investigate the social stigma surrounding divorce by examining the real-life experience of the women who have gone through it. Additionally, this study aimed to analyze the challenges faced by the divorced mothers. By doing so, this paper enriches the sociological understanding of divorce related issues and lived experiences of the divorced mothers within Pakistani society in a holistic manner. Then, the paper contributes to the body of sociological knowledge on the issues and lived experiences of divorce in Pakistani society reference. This study is groundbreaking as no prior research conducted in this specific context in Sialkot city.

Literature Review

In Pakistan, social stigma is vastly present about divorces. Divorced women have experienced many hurdles in starting their new life. Women after divorce were confronted with many inappropriate job proposals, negative rumors and also faced problems in starting a new relationship. Studies have indicated that workplace sexual harassment is more common among divorced and single women compared to their married counterparts (Muzaffar, et al 2018). Most divorced women have been deprived of psychological and emotional support to move on and start their new life. Mostly in our societies, women remained married for a long time because of the social stigma of divorced women. A social and emotional indicator that has affected divorced women relates to unhappiness,

annoyance, low self-confidence, and anxiety. Post-divorce regret becomes a hindrance in mental reconstruction after divorce. (Sadeghi Fasaei S, 2012). According to Amber's theory (2009), the phenomenon of post-divorce regret is intricately tied to specific contexts, influences by personal, social and cultural factors within each community.

Thaseem and Jayathunga (2017) noted divorced had negative influences on women such as their emotional, economic, and physical state become deteriorated. As compared to a divorced man most of the women could not get married again, and the concern of child nurture is specified to them, and they often drop in insufficiency. Society's social structure collapsed because of the increase of divorce of the spouses. Generally, divorce has emotional, financial, and social effects extensively (Wazeema, 2017). The common opinion is that divorced women do not have the right to remarry and are a continual disgrace for themselves and their families. At present, men do not have such fears they even use this stigma to trick women into living in abusive marriages instead of divorce. The children born to the couples who experience divorce are a continuous challenge for their parents especially single mothers (Kotwal, 2009). The perception of the divorce and the stigmas attached to this often leave a long-lasting impact not only on the lives of the divorcee but also on the children born into the wedlock (Zafar, 2014). Unfortunately, there is a lack of well-established societal norms that defines roles and relationships of post-divorce (McKenry, Price, Fine, & Serovich, 1992; Seltzer, 1991). These new roles are not always clear making it challenging to redefine individual and interpersonal roles. The single mothers in our society face challenges while upbringing their children after divorce.

Women faced challenges after divorce but with children, they faced more challenges in raising their children. Divorced women's children face challenges to adjust to society. Due to the woman's divorcee labeling, children become deprived of parental bonding and affection which hurt their socialization process. After divorce women are often confronted with financial troubles and are single women unable to maintain the necessities of their children (Nida, 2014).

Divorced mothers have to struggle hard to fulfill their children's needs so the children do not feel the absence of their father. Women with their children also feel burdened, so due to these children feeling inferior and lacking confidence. Divorce is not the end of the marital relationship between partners but also it has caused serious problems for children and adjustment problems in society. After divorce, women with their children encounter many financial, emotional, cultural, and social limits that imposed divorced women to face unhappiness. The findings of this research are quite as this literature in that most divorced women have experienced problems in rearing their children (Hamid, 2020). Divorce affects the heart, mind and soul of both mother and children. The effects can be from mild to strong and they can be short term to long term. The perspective of both family and society towards divorced women during and after the divorce process can significantly influence the decisions and lives of these women as they navigate through this challenging phase. Societal negative judgements and stigmas attached to divorce creates troubles between parent-child relationship.

Material and Methods

To gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of divorced mothers, the researcher followed the philosophical school. Phenomenological approach was used to understand how divorced mothers experience divorce in their lives. The methodology of this study was driven by qualitative research, which focused on the lived experiences of divorced mothers with their children to explore stigmatization and challenges they faced in society. The benefit of the qualitative method is that it emphasizes an individual's

understanding and experiences (Babbie, 2001). Non-probability sampling technique was used and in-depth interviews were conducted with the participants selected through purposive sampling from Sialkot, Pakistan. An informed consent was taken from the interviewees. Confidentiality of the data was ensured. Interview guide was prepared. Age, religion, gender and number of children were the criteria for selection of the participants. Interviews were conducted from the participants until no new information was generated. Data collection process was discontinued after the seventh interview as there was no new information was coming forth.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected through in-depth interviews. An interview length was between 50 minutes to 1 hour. The interview guide was prepared with questions related to socio-demographic information of the participants, post-divorce experiences, issues and challenges, views about solo parenting. the researcher used the procedure of line-by-line coding of narrative responses into chunks to execute thematic scrutiny. Coding the information set into chunks is a mechanism for considering the meaning of the data. To confirm suitable themes, each was well-defined and assessed in accord with what these themes had meaning in the social and cultural setting of Pakistani society. Transcription of the data was done by using the following procedure by Colaizzi's method. 1. Listening of the recorded interviews, 2. Extraction of the major statements of the interview, 3. Noting the meaning of each major statement, 4. Structuring of the information into themes, 5. Integrating the findings and relating it to the phenomenon under investigation, 6. Requesting the participants to read the report to ensure that it represented their responses. The data revealed five major themes.

Results and Discussion

This study recruited those women who have experienced divorce for the first time and had five years of duration of their divorce and have children with them. All the recruited women were the resident of urban areas aged between 28-45 years. Most of the women were doing regular jobs and earning a salary between 10,000- 25,000 PKR. The demographic characteristics of the research participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Socio-Demographic information of the Participants

Interviewees	Pseudonyms ID	Age years	Qualification	Duration of divorce	Occupation	Monthly income/ source of income	Family system	residence	No. of children
1	PA	33	Middle	6 years	Tailor	10k/financial independent	Nuclear	Rural area	2
2	PB	32	Bs honors	5 years	Teaching	15k/Financial independent	joint	Urban area	3
3	PC	28	Matric	5 years	N/A	Supported by Mother	joint	Rural area	1
4	PD	39	M Phil	6 years	Work at salon	20k/Financial independent	joint	Urban area	2
5	PE	28	Primary	5 years	N/A	Supported by Brother	Nuclear	Rural area	2
6	PF	30	Masters	5 years	Teaching	25k/financial independent	joint	Urban area	1
7	PG	45	B. A	5 years	Home Tutor	12k/financial independent	Nuclear	Urban area	4

During data analysis, five major themes that emerged, included character assassination "Divorced women as bad women", post-divorce harassment of women,

financial insecurity, social and self-stigmas experienced by divorced mothers and the loss of self-respect and importance in family. Categorization of themes was done for better understanding of stigmatization associated to divorce. It also helped in understanding the issues and challenges confronted by the divorced women in upbringing of their children as single parent. All the themes were inter-related.

Character Assassination “Divorced Women as Bad Women”

The status of women after divorce become deteriorated in our society in contrast to married women. Most women experience blaming as “bad women” and “Manhos” by their relatives, and sometimes by their close family members. As it is evident from existing literature divorce is at least a disgraceful act, the women who have filed for divorce were found as instigators could be perceived as convicted of creating conflicting disputes in families and always judged by others. (Parke, 2015)

In a face-to-face interview conducted on Tuesday, October 18, 2022, participant PB shared her experience as follows,

“For women, I think the margin to do any mistake would get very narrow after divorce because if a woman does any mistake, she is not forgiven easily in our society.”

Participant PC endorsed this in a face-to-face interview conducted on Thursday, October, 20,2022:

“When I go to my relative’s house, they do not want to meet me and said why she came to our house, also consider me as bad (manhosiyat) to their homes. Their attitude towards me was very disrespectful and they criticize me consider me as a manhoos, wrong woman so after hearing all this labeling and backlashing, I feel disrespectful and loss of prestige”.

Participant PF expressed her views in a face-to-face interview conducted on Monday, December, 5, 2022, “Most family members intentionally talked bad about divorced mother to their children, that she does wrong with their father, or she is not a good woman, so the children felt psychological distress or dishearten and lose their trust in their mother”

Participant PG told in a face-to-face interview conducted on Wednesday, December, 7, 2022. “Mostly people consider divorced women are the wrong woman and home breaker they avoid communicating with you and due to these women feel neglected and their children also suffer due to the divorce label on their mother”.

As most of the participants reported that they experience labeling and constant judgment from society which made them feel lost in their social prestige. This labeling also has a negative influence on divorced women’s children as they also face the accusation of being divorcee children. Similarly, literature, mentions divorce stigma and labeling have damaged women’s identity in society (Parke, 2015)

Post-Divorce Harassment of Women

After divorce women experience a loss of respect and social position in society and experience their social prestige in society become decline. After divorce woman’s dignity in society become deteriorated. Most men look at divorce women with filthy eyes and harasses them. Our society considers divorce women as wrong women also judge their character. As quite alike to existing studies that stigmatization is recognized as to label

ultimate disassociation, and differences, to stereotype in addition, the embedding of the influential in power, the propagation of social discriminations also the demolition of ethical character. (Brenda, 2005).

As Participant PA in a face-to-face interview conducted on Monday, October, 17, 2002 expressed her opinions: "When people know that she is divorced and single, men around her tries to tempt her. Every man knows that her financial condition is weak, might have physical needs so they try to tempt her to consider her "Kharab Aurat". It is my personal experience when I tell others about my divorce, they sympathize with me and offer their help but in the end, their hidden objective is the same they try to tempt and harass."

Participant PB said, "When a woman wants to go outside for a job or work then she faces hurdles from male members of society. Firstly, it's not easily accepted by our society when a woman has a certain tag attached to their identity, then she faces more hurdles because people negatively perceive divorced women. Divorced women face a lot of obstacles such as negative stares of other men, harassment and other people continuously pass their judgment about divorced woman character calling her "Buri Aurat" or "Kharab Aurat".

Participant PE in a face-to-face interview conducted on Monday, November, 7, 2022, stated that, "Most people see divorced women with wrong intentions when they know that woman is a divorcee and start judging how she will manage her and her children's expenses, also people judge divorced women's character from where she gets support and how she is managing all those expenses.

Participant PF added; "When I went for a job interview and during an interview when they got to know that I am a divorcee firstly they started to sympathize with me and hired me but after some days I felt uncomfortable and faced harassment, so I left that place"

Participant PG endorsed this, "When divorced women go for a job for her children, it's her necessity but her neighbors and relatives consider her as the wrong woman, most of the time people see her with dirty intentions. If divorcee woman is uneducated and unskilled then she faced hurdles to adjust in society, they treat a woman as she is physically and financially needy, so women face dirty looks of other men when they go out."

Financial Insecurity

After divorce, mostly women are confronted with financial insecurity. Divorce has great financial implications on women as compared to men in our society. In the absence of employment or a source of income, numerous divorced women find themselves relying on their parents for support. In case of the deceased parents or poor parents, divorced women find other sources (small jobs and home-based businesses) for financial security. In most of the cases, after the death of husband or divorce from the husband who is considered the breadwinner of the family in a patriarchal society, women's financial condition cripples down drastically. As noted in literature a greater number of women economically dependent on their husband during the maintenance of marriage and after the end of marriage mostly depend upon inevitably in their family (Singh, 2013).

As participant PA reported about the financial crisis that women faced after her divorce.

“After separation, women mostly worried about their children to fulfill their needs such as their education, food, and other necessities. Women after divorce do not have any income or financial support so they faced a lot of problems to fulfill their children’s needs.”

She further added, “My education is not enough to get a good job and with the divorce label it’s more difficult to work outside so due to this, I feel burdened to my family.”

Participant PB weighed in by saying that “When a woman is uneducated and unskilled does not have a job to support their children, the divorced woman becomes dependent on the family, then her child will also get dependent on them and face a lot of problems like inferiority complex, neglect.”

Participant PF in her interview shared that divorced woman have faced more financial challenges and they get mentally stressed about how to manage all these expenses to meet their children’s needs like education, food, etc.

“I am from a middle-class family I am always worried and struggle to fulfill the needs of my child. Most of the time by looking other fathers buying their children toys or any stuff they want, so my children feel complex and show their desire to buy all those toys, but due to financial issues, I cannot buy all those toys. I often tell my son, whenever I have enough money, I will buy you all these things. Most children start working in shops to manage house expenses”.

It is clear from the above responses that a divorced woman experiences financial burden to feed, educate and provide other basic necessities of life. Dissolution of marriage has significant negative impacts on the family members, with serious financial effects on divorced women and their children (Ezeume, 2020)

Social and Self-Stigmas Faced by Divorced Women

The ending of marriage was disturbing for the women subsequently they experience social stigma from their family and relatives. Majority of participants agreed due to this labeling woman blame themselves. They were confronting the customs established by society. The negative perspectives of the society towards a divorced woman, influences the way she lives her life.

According to participant PC, she said

“I faced a lot of social and negative labeling from my relatives and family. Most people blamed that she is the wrong woman. She would have been more patient and compromised to maintain her marriage. Also socially labeled me as she broke her own house. Many people also blame without knowing actual reality that she has an affair. Her husband rejects her and so on. All stigma is only faced by women no one criticizes men on divorce. After listening to others blaming me, I think it might happen to me just because I did bad deeds or any deviance”.

Participant PD endorsed this by adding in a face-to-face interview conducted on Friday, October, 21, 2022, “Yes, there is a social stigma that divorced women faced. According to my experience, people start judging divorced woman and label her as “Awara” woman. It is also said that she is not mature enough or do not know how to maintain her home. Our society keeps on highlighting her flaws, but no one wants to know the actual reason for her separation. It might be that her husband is a drug addict or abuse

her that is why women get separated, but our society keeps on labeling and criticizing her for her divorce or as rejected women.”

For self-stigma, she added:

“After hearing negative comments about my divorce, I started judging myself and consider it’s my fault. I repeatedly thought, it might be a punishment from Allah that I might have done something wrong with someone. I always think why this happened to me? I get emotionally upset and feel the loss of support.”

As participants reported along with facing social stigma, they also experienced individual or self-stigma. The individual disturbed might guilt himself or herself intended for such a misfortune. Some of the theme discussions are somewhat similar found in literature, the majority of divorced women experience stigmatization, denial, and loneliness as an outcome of their separation (Pachauri, 2018).

Loss of Respect and Importance in Society

With divorce labels, women are considered wicked and responsible for the end of their marriage. They have to face discrimination in a patriarchal society. They are thought to be difficult creature to be lived with. They are often perceived as a stain to the prestige of the family. They witness disdain in the eyes of the society for themselves. Due to this loss of respect and prestige divorced women relationship with family becomes deteriorated. The children of a divorced woman also get affected by this situation and often cause trouble in parent-child relationship. the children in such families feel neglected and they are not accepted by the society. Parental control also weakens due to the negative remarks which are shaping the mind of the children against their mother.

According to participant PC, after divorce, most women and their children suffer. She faces more difficulties as compared to divorced men. Men have more choices after divorce as they can easily remarry. They have more liberty and no one questions them about their divorce or criticize them. Most women and their children faced blaming, labeled as rejected due to this they lost their respect in family and society.

Participant PF stated, “After the stigma of divorce my personality and identity get affected very badly. This stigma overshadows all the good qualities of a woman, and people start ignoring her and women feel neglected and isolated. After the divorce, I feel, I have lost my importance and social respect in my family.

She further added, “Even I am an independent woman after my divorce, I also suffer from difficulties and most family members want me and my child feel bad by their criticism. They ignore my opinions in many important matters and it makes me feel insignificant.”

Participant PG reported that “Society mostly consider woman as burden. And with the divorce label, they become more vulnerable and are not accepted by society. Most people consider divorced woman wicked and home breaker. They avoid communicating with her and her children. Society blames her which causes the loss of self-respect.”

The majority of participants expressed they experience loss of respect and importance after divorce. Divorce is not welcomed and approved in our society and divorced women with their children face adverse responses from family members they consider as failure or incapable. As it is evident in current literature many psychologists recognized several processes engaged in stigmatization. That comprises adverse behavior

and direct differentiation (reaching from informal social elimination through gossip) to the constructed differentiation and inequality such as counter to ethnic subgroups, the elderly, and victims) (Lawrence, 2007).

Discussion

The theory of stigma has been adopted to guide this research. The stigma-related theory was presented by Erving Goffman in 1963. He had been the first to transcribe stigmatization as a socially constructed, a “mark of disgraces” and a stain on identity on one’s reputation, which becomes defining attribute of an individual. The theory of stigma has supported the topic of stigma-related perception about divorce and challenges faced by divorced women with children in Sialkot, Pakistan by the sense that divorce is considered an act of deviance and at the lowest disgraceful act in our society. Research findings have shown most of the participants agreed that the perception of stigmatization of divorced mothers in our society is generally adverse than the stigma. It is like a stain on a person’s character or identity, as mentioned in one of the themes; divorced women also experienced character assassination and our society does not accept stigmatized women easily. Divorce results in many social, economic and psychological obstructions for the divorced women. Further findings indicate that majority of the divorced women experienced restrictions in maintaining their social relations. They are solely blamed for the dissolution of their marriage in patriarchal structure of the society. Thus, it leads to the negative perspective of the society towards the divorced women and how they spend their lives after divorce. As our findings quite relate to literature such as “Divorced women would also be excluded and rejected by the family and friends” (Luppardini, 2017).

Many divorced mothers expressed their grief concern over the upbringing of their children as they encountered massive financial and emotional burden after divorce. Due to the stigmatization of divorce, children of divorced women become deprived of parental bonding and affection which have a negative effect on their socialization process. Most of the women found it hard to fulfil the basic needs of their children such as food, clothing, schooling and other necessities. The findings of the research are quite as this literature in that most divorced women have experience problems in rearing their children (Hamid, 2020). Moreover, participants reported that after divorce at first, women faced social stigma, people start to blame and judge their character by labeling them as the wrong woman, which also affected their children relation with them. Stigmatization about their mother lost their confidence on their mother and children also face the stigma of divorcee child. After constantly hearing social stigma women also started blaming themselves for all the bad happening to them and their children. Literature supported the results as soon after divorce, certain divorced mothers found themselves regretting their choice of divorce. Women experiencing divorce regret tend to look back at their past with a sense of pity and feel remorseful regarding circumstances in which they might have made different choices (Arezoo Pirak, 2019). So, stigma has a negative influence on their personality in society. Some of the theme discussions are somewhat similar found in literature, the majority of divorced women experience stigmatization, denial, and loneliness as an outcome of their separation (Pachauri, 2018).

Conclusions

The research paper explored the post-divorce issues and challenges faced by divorced mothers and their lived experiences of stigmatization related to their divorce. in Sialkot, Pakistan. Divorce has adverse consequences on women with children as it has a social stigma, emotional insecurity, and financial insecurity that made women more deteriorated and vulnerable in society. The breakdown of the family structure is occurring

at an alarming rate globally. Divorce is a problem that leads to the roots of other social, economic, and cultural restraints, which enforce divorced women to live a distressing life in society. Divorcee children are also deprived of their parent's affection because of divorced status. In a significant way, which harms their socialization process. Divorce has not merely the end of the matrimonial relationship among spouses but also causes many serious challenges for their offspring impacting their ability to adapt with society. Research findings indicate that divorce continues to encounter societal disapproval and resistance, particularly subjecting women to blame, critique and isolation. They face significant challenges, wherein they are not only responsible for providing for their children but are also compelled to fulfil the roles of both parents.

Recommendations

The present moment necessities a shift away from the notion of divorced individuals bringing shame upon their families' reputation. Instead, we should advocate for their rightful entitlements and recognition within the community. As a notion, we stand at a juncture where stigma attached to divorce or "Talaq" must be entirely eradicated. This transformation is pivotal for the realization of our aspiration for a thriving and impartial society. In the light of these research insights, it is recommended that the shame and stigma attached to the divorce should be reduced and pressures on the women to continue disturbing marriages for the sake of family honor or children should be discouraged. The involvement of the governmental bodies in the implementation of laws related to stigmatization and harassment. Non-governmental organizations working for gender, social welfare agencies and civil society are essential stake holders in this very issue.

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