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COMBATING MULTIFACETED CHALLENGES AMIDST DIVORCE STIGMA: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF DIVORCED MOTHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores the lived experiences of divorced mothers. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to analyze the findings of the study. Six divorced mothers were interviewed using an in-depth interview technique. A purposive and snowball sampling method was employed. The study identified a total of six themes and their resultant subordinate themes. The current paper discusses "Combating Multifaceted Challenges amidst Divorce Stigma" and its subordinate themes: socioemotional turmoil, existential crisis, and Socioeconomic challenges. The results highlight the urgent need for society to recognize the complex challenges faced by divorced mothers and underscore the importance of developing compassionate support systems to promote emotional well-being and assist individuals in adjusting to life after divorce. Divorce can be endured with dignity, resilience, and hope for a better future only through mutual understanding and coordinated efforts to destigmatise the situation and provide genuine support.

Keywords: *Divorced mothers, qualitative analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis, stigma*

INTRODUCTION

Divorce is a common occurrence in today's global culture. The United Nations Organization (2022) reports that 4.08 out of every 1000 married people globally file for divorce. In Western culture, divorce is seen as a legal choice for couples who are experiencing irreconcilable differences or unhappiness in their relationship, as the dissolution of marriage is frequently seen through a lens of individual liberty and personal fulfilment (Nielsen, 2013). Legal frameworks in the West usually offer easily navigable divorce pathways, incorporating protocols for dividing assets, allocating child custody, and providing financial assistance. Whereas divorce is seen as a last resort in Islam, where marriage is considered sacred as a lifelong commitment that must be fulfilled before attempts at reconciliation may be made. As a result, while Islamic and Western viewpoints accept the existence of divorce, their guiding ideas, methods, and cultural settings are different (Saleem et al., 2022). When it comes to marriage, many people do not perform as well as they should, even if both the husband and the wife are generally devout, practising Muslims. They might then fail to treat each other respectfully and neglect their responsibilities within the marriage, as stipulated by Islamic law (Riaz, 2019). Even though Allah views *talaq* as the most repugnant of all legal practices, it is forbidden in Islam for spouses to continue a hostile reconciliation that

could result in dreadful experiences. Islam acknowledges that in such circumstances a marriage should be ended by divorce or another method if a resolution is not attainable. There is no need for divorce to be "ugly"; rather, it should be carried out with thoughtfulness, dignity, and gentleness. Therefore, Dogarawa, while discussing marriage and divorce in Islam, explained that the *Shari'ah* is the most comprehensive and ideal law ever provided to humanity and is a blessing bestowed upon this Ummah by Allah Most High., This legislation never failed to provide answers. When such circumstances arise, the spouses (and possibly other individuals assisting them) should follow the specific procedures outlined in Allah's *Shari'ah* in an attempt to rectify the situation (Dogarawa, 2009).

A survey conducted by Gallup Pakistan showed that a major proportion of Pakistanis think that the country's divorce rate has gone up. According to the survey, 48% of respondents think that the reason for the rise in divorce rates in Pakistan is due to a lack of patience, 33% think that it is because of a break from religion, 27% blame the influence of western culture, 12% blame women for prioritizing their careers, and 9% think that men losing interest in their marriage is one of the reasons for divorce. The data shows no discernible difference, with the exception that more urbanites (21%) than ruralites (6%) attribute marriage breakdown to women's greater interest in their careers (Gallup, 2019).

However, concerning divorce prevalence in Punjab (Pakistan), the number of Khula cases rose from 16,942 in 2014 to 18,901 in 2016. In Karachi, 11,143 cases were filed in 2019; 3,800 instances in the first quarter of 2020; 14,943 cases in the six months leading up to June 2020; 4,752 of these cases were settled, impacting 2100 children and 2,000 women who divorced in 2019 (Khan et al., 2019). Baluchistan, a province in Pakistan, exhibits a relatively low divorce rate compared to other provinces. This can be attributed to the tribal nature of the region, where divorce is viewed as a dishonour to the family and the tribe. Men belonging to the tribe perceive it as a sign of disrespect to the tribe's honour. (Pakistan Cultural Research Society, 2018). The low divorce rate in the province conceals the high prevalence of domestic abuse in Baluchistan; the largest obstacle to gathering statistics and reporting incidents is the region's no-go areas for most media outlets.

Factors About the Rise in Divorce Rate in Pakistan

One of the most heartbreaking losses is divorce, which is sometimes called the "death of marriage" as it disrupts the foundational structure of the family unit (Pachauri, 2018). Divorce in the West is the result of a complicated web of interrelated events. These include the rise in same-sex weddings, cohabitation, individualism, religiosity, and the evolving nature of marriage. Couples who struggle to properly communicate their wants, worries, and feelings are among the most common problems (Pryor, 2013). Financial stressors also loom large, as even the strongest partnerships can be strained by arguments over spending patterns, financial priorities, and debt. Divorce is frequently sparked by infidelity, a hideous breach of trust that undermines the basis of closeness and commitment. Comparably, a lack of intimacy—either physical or emotional—can cause couples to go in different directions and exacerbate feelings of isolation and detachment. Parenting differences, such as conflicts about approaches to and choices made regarding raising children, can put stress on marriages and lead to disappointment and conflict. Couples may discover that as they grow older, their interests, objectives, and aspirations become irreconcilably different (Scott et al., 2013).

While the factors contributing to divorce can vary across cultures and societies, several common factors are often cited and contributing to the rise in divorce rates in Islamic countries, and Pakistan in particular, such as the higher education of the female partner; sectarian differences; geographical factors; ethnic differences; linguistic differences; cultural differences; communication issues; financial problems; infidelity and incompatibility (Ahmed, 2016; Ramzan et al., 2018). Understanding the causes of the rapid rise in divorce rates over time is crucial, considering the current situation. The most common factors responsible for the rising divorce rate in Pakistan according to different researchers incompatibility (Khan et al., 2019), communication issues (Ajaegbu et al., 2015), domestic violence and abuse (Seidu et al., 2021), financial issues (Dew et al., 2012), forced marriages Shita & Zeleke, 2024), history of parental divorce (Sultana & Azzam, 2021), lack of patience (Rubab et al., 2023),

Media Idealization and Unrealistic Marital Expectations, that is exposure to idealized media portrayals fosters unrealistic expectations in relationships, leading to dissatisfaction and increased divorce intentions (Banjo, 2022) sociocultural pressure, gendered power imbalance that contributes to marital discords (Akhtar, 2016), infidelity (Darbandi et al., 2024) along with emotional neglect, a lack of emotional support, or an absence of intimacy. These elements might eventually cause the relationship to fail (Kamali et al., 2020).

Divorce is a very sensitive topic, and even in this 21st century, being a divorcee is still considered taboo. Pakistan is a patriarchal and collectivist society in which men are primarily in charge of making decisions, both inside the family and in larger social contexts (Ikram & Usman, 2022). Therefore, divorce can be a difficult and emotionally challenging process for everyone involved, including the spouses, their children, and their extended families; in Pakistan, coming out from the appreciated social status of being married, a woman who parts ways with their spouse (either by taking *khula'a* or *talaq*) faces a plethora of problems. These problems can be in the form of financial, emotional or psychological (Khalid, 2023). Divorced women with children are often stigmatised and marginalised, and the experiences of these women with children can vary widely depending on their social, economic, and cultural backgrounds (Sharma, 2011). Divorced women are frequently stigmatised in society and have been referred to as "*manhoos(disgusted)*," "*awara(wanderer)*," "*besabri(impatience)*," and "*nakam(failed)*", and they are made vulnerable to criticism and judgment (Saleem et al., 2022). Such circumstances also befell their children. For the children who experience it, parental separation is a negative life event with numerous repercussions. In a study looking into the impact of parental separation on mother and father involvement in their adolescent children's lives, Grätz (2017) discovered that father involvement is adversely affected by parental separation. However, father engagement in families who are socioeconomically challenged only decreases as a result of separation. Furthermore, girls experience less father engagement than boys do. Parental separation does not affect mother participation.

Likewise, because divorce alters routines and life patterns, it leaves divorcees shocked. It triggers emotional responses such as hostility, hopelessness, and depression. Divorcees experience socialisation disturbances as a result, which makes them feel rejected and alone (Mendoza et al., 2019). It depletes their physical vitality, strength, confidence, and ability to function, in addition to causing anguish. They experience humiliation, despair, agitation, and depressing emotions; as a result, they give up on daily living (Patoari, 2020). A quantitative study by Zafar & Kausar (2014) compared the emotional and social issues that married and divorced women faced. Results indicated that compared to married women, divorced women had higher levels of state anger, anger out, and overall anger, as well as sadness, anxiety, stress, loneliness, and anxiety during social interactions. The findings also indicated a strong link between women's emotional and social issues. The results also indicated that friends' and significant others' social support predicted women's despair and loneliness, as well as stress and depression. Divorce affects not just the two individuals involved, but also the two families as a whole. Research indicates that while divorce's negative effects often affect both parties, women are more vulnerable than men in the wake of a divorce. These ladies are frequently left defenceless because the country's joint family system is dying, which makes it harder for divorced women to support and maintain themselves, particularly if they are illiterate or housebound and cannot work (Qamar & Faizan, 2021). The primary reasons why Pakistani women opt to remain in an unhappy marriage are due to their financial situation and children (Shah, 2016). Khan et al. (2019) carried out an additional qualitative study to investigate the causes and effects of divorce. Although a gender-based analysis of the data was not provided by the researchers, the major remarks cited under several themes indicated that the causes for divorce were sexual unhappiness, in-law interference, temperamental incompatibility, intimate partner violence, and extramarital affairs. Financial and psychological problems were mentioned as divorce's aftereffects. Despite the lack of a gender-based analysis, women make up 70% of the study's participants.

Understanding the emotional and psychosocial experiences and challenges of divorced mothers is an important topic that is often overlooked. It is essential to comprehend the struggles that these

women face. Research has shown that experiencing the loss of a marriage can be an emotionally taxing experience. Divorce can bring up a range of emotions, including sadness, anger, guilt, and regret. The end of a marriage can also mean the loss of a shared life, home, and financial stability, which can further complicate the healing process. To gain a deeper insight into the experiences of divorced Pakistani mothers, it is imperative to conduct qualitative research. Specifically, such research would aim to explore how these women navigate and confront challenges related to their post-divorce life and their experiences in a society where divorce remains stigmatized.

Objectives of the study

- To investigate the lived experiences of mothers navigating psycho-social, emotional and legal challenges.

Research Question

- What are the psycho-social, emotional and legal challenges experienced by the divorced mothers?

Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative research design consisting of In-depth interviews was used to explore the challenges experienced by divorced mothers (with children) post-divorce.

Participants

Six divorced mothers, between the ages of 26 and 30, who fulfilled certain qualifying requirements—such as having children between the ages of 1 and 10 years old, having completed at least an Intermediate level of education, and having been married for longer than two years—were purposefully chosen from Peshawar and Lahore for a comprehensive inquiry. The participants were selected to explore their lived experiences and challenges encompassing psychological, social, emotional, legal and economic issues that they have encountered after divorce, specifically about overcoming the grief of losing both their marriage and child custody. The participants had been divorced for a minimum of two to five years. The participants gave their permission for audio recording to be done.

Sampling Technique

Purposive and snowball sampling strategies were employed in the study. The initial selection of participants was based on pre-established eligibility criteria that aligned with the research goals, guaranteeing that the chosen individuals could offer significant perspectives on the subject matter being studied. Snowball sampling was used to increase the number of participants after the first selection. Individuals who had already been accepted into the study were urged to recommend other divorcing mothers who fit the study's requirements to other women in their groups or social networks. The sample size increased as a result of the referral process's iterative procedure, making it possible to record a greater range of perspectives.

Inclusion criteria

- Divorced women with children
- Age of participants between 25-30(max. 35) years
- Education of participants Intermediate & above
- The duration of an intact marriage is more than two years
- Duration post-divorce is at least 2-5 years
- Age of children between 1-10 years

Interview Guide

A self-constructed interview guide was employed. Initially, basic information was collected from relevant sources to help develop the interview guide. The questions were crafted after a thorough review of existing literature on the research topic. Following this review and consultations with expert marital counsellors, the guide was carefully prepared, focused on the challenges faced by divorced mothers in their environment. Consequently, the researcher utilised an interview guide with open-ended questions to gather detailed and descriptive responses from participants. These questions aimed to provide insights into the experiences of mothers who have lost custody or whose children do not live with them. By adopting this approach, the study seeks to deepen understanding of the subject and produce meaningful findings. The researcher pilot-tested the interview guide with one potential participant, which helped identify any ambiguities, gaps, or areas for improvement. The original guide comprised nine open-ended questions, but improvements and supplementary follow-up questions were added. To gain a comprehensive understanding of their pre-marriage life, marital experiences, and post-divorce

issues, the questions included structured queries starting with basic demographic data and exploring marriage details such as the spouse's history, the nature of the relationship, and expectations versus reality. Further questions addressed children, the length of marriage, and reasons for divorce. Additionally, the study examined legal and religious rights, along with post-divorce concerns such as stigma, financial struggles, custody disputes, and emotional trauma. To explore co-parenting challenges and personal growth after divorce, participants reflected on their emotional journey, coping mechanisms, and relationships with their children. The process concluded with discussions about acceptance, future goals, and offering advice to others in similar circumstances.

Procedure

Before conducting interviews, all participants were contacted formally and informed about the study's nature & its purpose. Prior permission was taken from the participants for conducting an in-depth interview and audio recording of the interview. All participants were informed that their responses would be kept confidential. Individual participation was voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw at any moment without explanation. The interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes. The interview contained basic information regarding the participant's life, their education, family background, marriage, their in-laws' family system, hurdles they faced, reasons for divorce, support from family and friends, how society and family treated them as divorcees, challenges they faced regarding legal issues, how they coped with the grieving process and their present situation. The collection of data continued until no further noteworthy or pertinent themes were identified.

Rigor of the Qualitative Data

The researcher has used several strategies, such as debriefing participants and abstaining from interfering in their conversations, in an effort to preserve the study's objectivity and credibility. The supervisor was consulted regularly throughout the data collection and analysis processes. This would allow for the discussion and resolution of any issue that the researcher has not thoroughly examined or comprehended. The research supervisor routinely read and discussed the transcripts of the interviews to guarantee theoretical sensitivity and identify any. In addition, a journaling, audit trail of the data was also ensured by documenting each stage of data collection, coding and theme generation and interpretation to ensure the transparency and dependability of the study.

Data Analysis

The data from the interviews were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative method designed to offer in-depth analyses of individual lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). The first author recorded, transcribed, and coded each interview and then assigned themes to it. The themes were discussed and carefully evaluated against the data by the first author with the help of the supervisor several times during this iterative phase.

Results

Combating Multifaceted Challenges amidst Divorce Stigma

Participants described encountering a variety of difficulties after identifying significant factors that led to their divorces. But these difficulties did not end when their marriages ended; on the contrary, they became more intense following a divorce. The respective theme addressed the various obstacles that these divorced women faced after a divorce, such as socio-emotional turmoil, existential crisis and socioeconomic difficulties.

a) ***Socio-Emotional Turmoil***

The socio-emotional conflicts that followed a divorce took many forms, such as low self-esteem, loss of self-respect, and a persistent fear of being left alone, as reported by the participants. Furthermore, participants also explained that anxiety about the future developed, accompanied by worries about being stigmatized and a lack of knowledge about what is ahead. The weight of these emotional loads made it difficult for the participants to interact with others and carry out regular duties. When it comes to considering beginning a new family after divorce, divorced women frequently struggle with overwhelming worries. Majorly, all the participants agreed that they had developed enormous fears in life after divorce, and that they find it difficult to face people and start a family again. They reported that they find it challenging to be open to the prospect of a new relationship because of trust concerns brought on by past pain and betrayal. Their insecurities and worries about one's suitability for

love and commitment resulted from emotional wounds from the divorce process that were still there. They were also troubled by concerns about making the same mistakes twice. As reported by participant 2:

I have thought about a second marriage, but my heart doesn't believe that I
will find another one after stumbling upon this one.

Participant 1 reported this as:

Second marriage... umm... I feel that if my father can leave, then my brother can leave too. Sister-in-laws will come and have their own responsibilities. They won't be able to take care of me like they do now. I don't want to end up alone, regretting later that my child is gone. I'm afraid of being left alone.

Participant 3, while discussing future apprehensions and sharing her views on second marriage, reported as:

I haven't thought about a second marriage yet because people tend to take advantage of you when you are divorced. They believed that you would compromise easily; you would be afraid of facing another divorce. Moreover, if you are divorced, married men offer more for marriage, you think they will understand you, they will do good to you, but no, if you ever hear them, you will be surprised, they say it's good that she earns; she will feed us too, and she won't have many expectations and demands. much from us. Some even say that they will keep their wives and us both, meaning they want pleasure from both sides. I haven't decided anything like that yet because of my daughter and mother. For me, they are enough; it is better to be single than such men.

However, the participants have reported that they encountered many challenges post-divorce, but the most difficult was the loss of their self; their own identity. They reported that they have lost confidence in them and have developed fears, which make them more fearful of the future. The participants also expressed that they find it difficult to find happiness again in life, and it will take them a long time to start over again. The participants concluded that divorce has affected them to the core that they feel paralysed and find difficulty in performing daily life tasks.

b) *Existential Crisis*

While discussing further the participants shed light on the challenges of existential crisis apart from socio-emotional turmoil and majorly all the participants agreed and reported that they faced numerous difficulties such as loss of identity, self-blame, decision making difficulties and doubting their abilities to the extent that the collection of these difficulties highlighted the severe effects divorce had on their mental health and they began to have skeptic views about themselves after divorce. While addressing this issue, participant 4 reported this in a trembling voice:

I felt like I had become a.... puppet... anyone can fall in love with me whenever they want and leave whenever they feel like. As if I have no feelings. I became a symbol of attraction; everyone, married or unmarried, had offered to be in a relationship. No one talked about marriage; it was just like having fun with friends. As if I would quietly give them all the rights. I feel as if I am some lewd

When it comes to divorce, women with children face many more difficulties. The identification of women as "divorcees" itself harms their socialization process, but because of children, it gets worse. All the participants reported that they found difficulty with societal acceptance, and they began to doubt their own identity, feeling that they had lost their own self after divorce. The majority of the participants started to blame themselves for the cause of divorce and all that has happened to them, which contributes to a general loss of confidence in oneself, resulting in depersonalization.

Participant 6, while discussing her experiences in this regard, reported in a shivering and sobbing tone:

I have limited myself; whenever I went somewhere, everyone would first ask about the divorce and then about the child, and then everyone would ask why I left the child; I would have endured for the child. Then people say, "Oh, an innocent child, what a fate!" or things like, "God should not grant children to those who do not value them,"— words like these used to tear my heart apart.

Participant 6 also reported:

Whenever I went to my relatives, they always asked about my expected second marriage. Usually, they try to comfort me, but it creates so much pressure on me that I lose self-respect and feel that the mark of divorce is attached to my personality. I started feeling detached from myself.

The participants showed intense emotions of hopelessness and unworthiness by stating that divorce makes life much more awful than being in a toxic relationship, since everyone only sees them as divorcees, even though they are simply ordinary individuals with the same feelings. The participants believed that they were nothing more than a puppet and a punching ball that anybody may use at any time, and that they had lost every right to a peaceful life, according to themselves.

c) *Socioeconomic Difficulties*

Moreover, while discussing other difficulties, participants emphasised the difficulties associated with being financially dependent and social alienation they experienced as a consequence of divorce. and the society turned mean to them. The participants discussed that the primary problem that emerged right after a divorce was financial instability, which was due to a lack of assistance from family, particularly for women. Four out of the six participants said their family did not provide them with any financial assistance. They were seen as a burden to them, as in Pakistan, most women are entirely dependent on their fathers before marriage and after marriage on their husbands for financial support. Nearly all the participants reported that financial pressure and emotional upheaval are exacerbated when one doesn't find secure employment and experiences workplace harassment. Participant 3, while sharing her experience, reported these challenges:

I was very disappointed because of the rejection from jobs. My confidence was already low, then I gave tuitions, and there were many difficulties in that, too.

Participant 3 further added:

You know that harassment happens everywhere. People approach you, listen to your pain, sympathise with you, and then exploit you. They think that this is used material, a cancelled draft, a tissue paper, use it and throw it away.

The majority of the participants recognized that getting a divorce was viewed as one of the most shameful, aberrant, deviant, and rebellious behaviors in our society. These participants said that although our society does not tolerate divorced women, Islam permits divorce when attempts at reconciliation have failed. Men rarely experience significant social implications from divorce, but women are frequently burdened alone with the social, economic and legal processes. Participants also reported that even their own families find it difficult to accept their divorced daughters, and they started to blame their daughters for getting a divorce.

Participant 6 reported this attitude as:

When I got divorced, everyone kept asking me the same question, What happened? You must have said something. They blamed me for being patient. Then my husband gave me a divorce in anger. My family and relatives said that even if he had given me a divorce, I should have stayed there because only one was given. These things hurt me a lot.

Participant 1, while addressing difficulties in societal acceptance, also reported this as:

My mother wanted to get me out of all this, but my father had left home. He hadn't come for a month, and he was saying, "You guys, get out of this house. I'll sell this house and get married again." My father had warned me before that if I came back with a divorce, I would divorce your mother, too.

The verbatim of the participants clearly indicated the extreme level of social and economic struggles they had to face. Almost all the respondents reported that they faced a lot of taunts from society and judgmental attitudes towards them, which contributed to social isolation and depersonalization. They began to depersonalize them, confining them to their homes, as reported by participant 1:

I used to attend family functions and get-togethers, but when the frowns and glares from my close relatives started coming, I started feeling lonely. Everyone started asking for my divorce, and some people didn't let their children near me, thinking that I would harm their children out of jealousy, but that wasn't the case at all; I was yearning to feel the warmth of my baby, who was nursing when he left.

Participant 4 reported similarly as:

I had restricted myself, socially isolated, not going anywhere. I also avoided family gatherings because people kept asking the same question, Why did it happen? How did it happen? When would I get married again? How did a mother abandon her child? They didn't know about my condition, so it was easy for them to talk.

However, one of the participants, while expressing difficulties in social adjustment, reported that the situation got worse for them when the remarks were made by their own families and siblings, and

they found themselves worthless. This attitude is summed up by Participant 4's quote as:

After the divorce, I realized a daughter doesn't have a home of her own; she would have to adjust herself everywhere she went and listen to criticism, especially from blood relatives with whom you were born and raised. They felt that you had become a burden on them, and divorce became a torment.

Thus, the participants showed how myriad challenges that followed a divorce intensely impacted their well-being and sense of self in society. The participants acknowledged and disclosed that being divorced made it difficult for them to obtain acceptable employment, which exacerbated their financial difficulties. If they did find employment, they would likely face harassment at work, which would put them in danger emotionally.

The participants believed that their situations could have improved if they had received genuine support from society and family. Lack of financial independence had worsened the situation. Furthermore, participants verbatim indicated that the insincere sympathies from society have worsened their circumstances.

Discussion

Examining the rich experiences of women who have divorced requires delving deeply into the intricacies of their emotional environments and psychological adaptations. For this, the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method was utilized in this study to shed light on the complex viewpoints and personal experiences of the participants.

This theme explored the complex web of socio-emotional turmoil, existential crises, and issues with social adjustment that permeate the post-divorce experiences of divorced women, in an effort to begin the examination of the numerous challenges faced by these women. Women frequently face an overwhelming amount of socio-emotional difficulties after divorce. As couples deal with the dissolution of their marriage and the resulting changes in their lives, these could include feelings of loss related to the relationship as well as the anticipated future, despair and rage. A variety of symptoms, including mood swings, emotional instability, and trouble managing day-to-day stressors, can indicate socio-emotional turmoil.

Divorce is considered one of the most disgusting, abnormal, deviant, and rebellious activities in our culture. Divorce can also harm one's sense of value and self-esteem, which can result in feelings of inadequacy or self-doubt. After a divorce, women may find it difficult to reconcile their identities and responsibilities, especially if they invested a lot of emphasis on their marriage or are considered primarily as mothers. As divorce frequently brings up deeply underlying questions and thoughts about the meaning and purpose of life, women may struggle with existential issues, including identity, values, and beliefs, as well as where they fit in the world. Breaking up with someone might challenge women's beliefs about the future and make them face ambiguity and uncertainty. They can doubt their ability to build a happy life after the divorce as well as their decisions, goals, and priorities.

Divorced women are not accepted in our culture, although it is allowed in Islam in cases where attempts at reconciliation have failed. Men are rarely negatively impacted socially by divorce, but women are. It also becomes tough for even nuclear families to accept their divorced daughters, as they eventually become a burden on the families once again. In Pakistan's patriarchal society, men are viewed as authority leaders and the primary providers of finances, while women are supposed to stay inside the four walls of the home. Because of this ingrained role segregation, women are not socialized and encouraged to work. In addition, women are often excluded from inheriting shares, which limits their options in the event of a divorce (Rubab, 2021). Women thus encounter financial difficulties following divorce. According to published research, the majority of women depend on their husbands for financial support during their marriage, and if it dissolves, they must turn to their families (Singh, 2013). Due to their low levels of education, women may mostly rely on jobs at home or local businesses (Parveen & Rubab, 2013). It might also be difficult for women to reintegrate into social networks and create a new social identity after divorce. They could experience social rejection, stigma, or judgment from friends, family, or neighbours, which can worsen feelings of loneliness and isolation. These findings can be supported by a research study conducted by Hansen & Slagsvold (2012) who investigated the feelings of social and emotional isolation that divorced women in their middle years of life experienced. It looked at how divorce affects women's sense of identity, emotional

health, and social interactions while emphasizing the difficulties they have in making new friends and support systems.

Divorce can have a wide range of impacts on women, from emotional and social dislocation to mental health problems and emotional anguish. Becoming rejected by your spouse and abandoned by your friends, extended family, and biological family is the worst possible consequence. The findings are consistent with the results of the study conducted by Zafar & Kausar (2014) that examined the emotional and social challenges that married and divorced women encountered and found that divorced women exhibited higher levels of overall anger, state anger, and anger out than married women did. They also showed higher levels of depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, and anxiety in social situations. The results also showed a significant correlation between emotional and social problems faced by women. The findings also showed that the social support of friends and significant others influenced women's stress and depression, as well as their feelings of hopelessness and loneliness (Zafar & Kausar, 2014).

Moreover, several participants described how the myriad challenges that followed a divorce profoundly impacted their well-being and sense of self in society. Their financial and emotional problems worsened when they were harassed at work and were unable to find a stable job. This was made worse by the lack of social acceptance and insincere sympathies that didn't offer genuine assistance. The findings followed the research by Saeed & colleagues (2022) that examined the procedures about the experiences of divorced female employees in Pakistan, a developing country, at work and found out that peers who become targets of rumors about divorced women at work treat them unjustly. They also get fewer possibilities for training (Saeed et al., 2022).

Discrimination not only increases anxiety and a desire to flee, but it also damages cognitive function and affects the work-life balance. The results were supported by similar findings that some Pakistani social groups condemn divorced women, making them regret their decision. Social perceptions of divorced women include "ill-fated," "untouchable," and general undeservingness. They are treated with disrespect and mistrust. Social assistance is comparatively hard to come by for women who are single parents or recently gone through a divorce. Because women are incessantly reminded that they are nothing without a man in their lives, they are stigmatized, avoided, and treated like oddities (Doughty 2014; Wolf, 2014).

The findings can also be supported by a related study conducted by Fatima & Malik (2019) that investigated the psychological and socioeconomic difficulties that divorced women in Pakistan face. The results showed divorced women in Pakistan's patriarchal society faced particular challenges like economic dependence, social stigma, psychological distress, and trouble getting support, and it emphasized the necessity of focused interventions to meet their particular needs and advance their well-being.

Conclusion

Divorce presents a wide range of complex obstacles, including social adjustment, financial hardship, and psychological well-being, especially for mothers who recently got divorced. Through the participant narratives, it was made clear that one of the deepest and upsetting effects of divorce was the loss of self-identity, which sets off a series of emotional challenges such as confidence issues, fear of the future, and trouble finding happiness again. Individuals going through a divorce were thrown into a vulnerable situation where they struggled with thoughts of worthlessness and hopelessness, which was made worse by shame from society and condemnation from family. The participants also reported that they found difficulty with societal acceptance, that they began to doubt their own identity, feeling that they had lost their own self after divorce. The majority of the participants started to blame themselves for the cause of divorce and all that has happened to them, which contributes to a general loss of confidence in oneself, resulting in depersonalization.

Limitations and Future Directions of the Study

- The research sample was exclusively comprised of divorced women. To gain a comprehensive understanding of post-divorce struggles and psychosocial dynamics, it is imperative to expand the sample to include divorced men as well. This will enable a thorough comparison of the experiences and challenges faced by both genders, contributing to a more nuanced and insightful analysis.
- The present study did not explore all perspectives due to time constraints, as it would have been beyond the scope of the study.

However, future studies should consider using method triangulation, which involves including the perspectives of religious scholars, custody lawyers, and marital counsellors.

- The current study should also include quantitative analysis to enhance its robustness. This will provide statistical insights and use numerical data to validate qualitative conclusions. Employing this mixed-method methodology will lead to a more nuanced interpretation of the results.

Implications of the study

The primary objective of this research is to deepen the comprehension of the psychological and emotional ramifications of divorce, specifically with a focus on the unique experiences of divorced mothers within the cultural context of Pakistan. The anticipated findings are expected to play a pivotal role in informing and shaping governmental policies.

The research findings not only inform policy decisions but also promote practical measures to support divorced women, particularly in terms of job and financial assistance. To enhance independence and resilience after divorce, the research underscores the importance of economic empowerment and advocates for the establishment of specific quotas for divorced women in both governmental and non-governmental organizations.

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