

THE IMPACT OF DIVORCE IN ABBOTTABAD: CAUSES, SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES, AND RELIGIOUS MEDIATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the effect of divorce in Abbottabad by explaining its reported causes, Socio-Psychological consequences, implications for children and role of religion in it. It takes the findings from a mixed-method thesis collection of data and replicates the same data with a descriptive survey of 150 respondents to produce the findings as a journal-ready research article that can be submitted to a social sciences journal. The findings reveal that there are multiple factors which influence divorce in Abbottabad: early marriage, domestic discord, psychological incompatibility, infertility and interference of in-laws, and financial pressure are all playing significant roles. The most common main reasons for early marriage were early marriage, close to early marriage, and a psychological incompatibility between the couple. Post divorce costs were also significant with 50.7% of respondents reporting mental health problems, 71.3% reporting moderate or high levels of social stigma and 46% reporting impact on children. 49.3 percent of the respondents sought religious guidance, indicating that religion is an important, but not universal, source of mediation, moral interpretation and post-divorce support. The paper suggests that increasing divorce rate in Abbottabad is a sign of shifting expectations, roles and conflict solving practices of marriage in a conservative setting. It endorses the need for a pre-marital counseling, availability of mental health services, awakening of children, legal awareness of a justice, compassion, and reconciliation approach in religious counseling.

Keywords: divorce, Abbottabad, marital conflict, mental health, children, social stigma, religion, family structure, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a key institution in the formation of families, moral regulation and social continuity in Pakistan. As marriage is widely interpreted in conservative and semi-urban environments like Abbottabad as a bond between two persons and a bond between two families, kinship relations and responsibilities based on religious orientations. Divorce therefore has implications not just in the ending of a marriage, it knows

no boundaries when it comes to social status, the organization of the household, child development, gender, and community. Research on divorce now focuses more on the multi-faceted nature of the social phenomenon of divorce than on the personal failure that once was associated with divorce. The increased exposure of divorce in Pakistan has come along with changes in education, media exposure, women bearing awareness of their rights,

economic fluctuations, and their changing expectations of emotional attachment in a marriage. Helplessness in marriage, poverty and pressure from the surrounding families were the three main factors which were indicated in marital problems examined earlier while on the other hand, newer research has shown that problems of communication failure, incompatibility, emotional dissatisfaction and consciousness of right have become increasingly important factors. The significance of these changes is particularly great in Abbottabad because the district has a mix of conservative family systems, and due to increasing educational aspirations and absorption of modern forms of marital expectation through urban contact.

Abbottabad is also part of Hazara where the studies have shown financial mismanagement, infertility, personality conflict, in-law interference, domestic violence and expectation from media were major factors causing marriage instability in the society. However, a focused journal style analysis of divorce in Abbottabad is still needed because there are locally specific aspects of divorce experiences that are influenced by localized social relations, family life and religious mediation practices. This paper attempts to fill this gap by concocting the findings of the study from the thesis to prepare an original research paper highlighting the effects of divorce in Abbottabad. This article attempts to achieve four goals: first, to present the various reported causes of divorce in Abbottabad; second, to present the possible cultural, social, psychological and economic impacts of divorce; third, to represent the impact of divorce on the individual, family and children; and fourth, to discuss role of religion in divorce, mediation in divorce and post-divorce adjustment. The major research question is: what is the impact of divorce on individuals, family and society in Abbottabad and what are social, psychological, economic and religious influences on the increasing rate of divorce?

Literature Review

Divorce as a Social and Family-System Disruption

A conceptualization of divorce has been developed which considers divorce generally as

a life change for individuals as well as a disruption of the family system. There are societies where high priority is placed on the importance of family honor, continuity of kinship, and the perpetuation of marriage, and divorce may therefore be stigmatized with a greater moral and social burden. Studies on divorce in Pakistan reveal that divorce is a part of a larger picture of gendered power, economic dependency, patriarchy, and family dynamics. By extension, divorce cannot solely be discussed as an issue of individual incompatibilities but must be situated in a broader context of domestic and social constructions in which expectations of the individuals involved are protected and which normalize their suffering.

A social and psychological approach also indicates that divorce is likely to follow a rather extended married life filled with stress. Marriage is filled with emotional, relational, and emotional neglect and bottomless conflict, domestic stress and pressure, and fear of societal judgment, leading to a steady decrease in marital satisfaction in the years leading up to the wedding license. Limited institutional support, uncertainty about children, loss of social status, stigmatization are all important factors affecting women's post-divorce experiences. The findings have clear implications for Abbottabad, where social conservatism and expectations for extended-family life may magnify the emotional toll, making it difficult for individuals to accept their lives are fundamentally altered.

Major Causes of Divorce

Typically, there will be a combination of factors causing divorce in Pakistan. These factors often occur in combination rather than individually: economic hardship, employment, dowry issues, interference of in-laws, inability to bear babies, domestic violence, incompatibility. Infertility continues to be a sensitive issue as often reproductive expectations are linked to women's status and identity in marriage. Extended family involvement, pressure to remarry, or emotional abuse may result from infertility in conservative communities.

Marital instability is also influenced by the local gender norms and roles. The study of Abbottabad reveals that married women's career ambitions face potential tensions due to

the interplay between aspirations and domestic pressures, as well as patriarchal influence and societal acceptance of women's work in the public sphere. For example, in marriage in which husband or in-laws take too much decision, women can feel frustrated, dependent and not autonomous. Meanwhile, men might feel the pinch in the areas of earning enough money and conforming to the traditional male role of provider in times of inflation and employment anxiety.

Consequences for Women and Children

The effects of divorce are gendered. Social stigma, care responsibilities and financial insecurity are the usual characteristics following marital separation, often taken by women. Opportunities for re-marrying or re-working, gossip/suspicious/fear, limited mobility all work towards stigma. Children are at risk due to divorce's effects on emotional security, supervision, school activities and social affiliation. The studies from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa suggest that children of divorced mothers could face emotional problems, as well as academic and social adjustment problems. International research does support the idea that divorce alone is not a family issue and but a change in family status as it can carry with it further risks of conflict, neglecting the children, bullying and emotional support. The importance of this literature is not that every child in a divorced family is equally affected, but that how well the parents' function, whether the family finances are stable and whether they have social support is key to their adjustment or possible for long-term impact.

Religion, Law, and Divorce

Divorce and Religion are intimately intertwined. Islam considers marriage as a grave contract (social as well as moral) and divorce as being allowed when reconciliation proves to be impracticable. In reality, though, religious values are subject to male customs and lack of law. For instance, even though delegated divorce rights are not provided or exercised within the marriage contract, women's vulnerability may be worsened by an abusive marriage and/or a repetitively troublesome marriage. The function of religion, therefore, needs to be carefully considered: it can help to

encourage reconciliation, good behavior and emotional strength; but religious misuse of authority can also evocatively cause stigma or unequal treatment.

This literature suggests a need for an Abbottabad-centric paper that considers causes, mental health issues, the well-being of children and religious mediation all in a combined perspective and within the framework of an empirical analysis. The present article tries to consider divorce as an overall social phenomenon rather than as a simple moral, legal and psychological.

Methodology

The design of the paper is descriptive mixed method and it is taken from the thesis on Abbottabad on Divorce Awareness and its increasing trend. The quantitative data was in the form of a structured survey answer from a sample of 150 and the qualitative data in the thesis was to be used to support and enhance meaning of the experiences associated with marital breakdown, stigma, family pressure and religious guidance. The quantitative tables were reworked into journal fashion results for the present article, and the discussion was reframed to discuss the findings in the light of relevant literature. Divorced persons, family members and persons related to divorce in community were selected as study population. Since there were no complete sampling frames for these sensitive family areas of research, the sampling approach was non-probability and field. This will reduce the generalizability of the study, but it enables the researcher to gain access to experiences which may have been untapped due to concern with stigma and privacy issues. This gave a final number of 150 people for the sample. Gender, education, perceived primary cause of divorce, post-divorce mental health, social stigma, perceived effects on children, and religious guidance during divorce were all aspects of the survey. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages). Results are given in tables and graphs, and then in registers of explanations, which connects the statistical pattern with sociological and psychological explanations. Ethical issues were particularly relevant as it is a sensitive topic in Abbottabad area about divorce. The research was highlighted by its

emphasis on the voluntary nature of the participation, confidentiality, and respectful handling of the experiences of the people

involved in the research. Any data given in the article represents aggregate and does not include any specific respondent.

Results and Interpretation

Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Female	81	54.0%
Male	69	46.0%
Total	150	100.0%
Primary	31	20.7%
Secondary	28	18.7%
Intermediate	31	20.7%
Bachelor	26	17.3%
Master	34	22.7%

Source: Field survey data, Abbottabad (n = 150).

The result presented in Table 1 indicates that the women population are slightly larger than the men population at 54.0 percent and 46.0 percent respectively. This represents the meaning of analyzing the pattern as in Pakistani society women tend to suffer from the social consequences of divorce in a more obvious manner. It is diverse in education distribution,

with master level respondents as the largest group (22.7 percent), followed by primary education (20.7 percent) and intermediate education (20.7 percent). The differences within the educational levels indicate that divorce is not limited to one social or educational location but, affects respondents across various locations.

Reported Causes of Divorce in Abbottabad

Table 2. Reported Primary Causes of Divorce in Abbottabad

Cause of Divorce	Frequency	Percentage
Early marriage	32	21.3%
Domestic conflict	30	20.0%
Psychological incompatibility	28	18.7%
Infertility	25	16.7%
In-law interference	21	14.0%
Financial issues	14	9.3%
Total	150	100.0%

Source: Field survey data, Abbottabad (n = 150).

The primary cause of divorce given in greatest number was early marriage as shown in Table 2. It was then followed by domestic conflicts at 20.0 percent and psychological incompatibility at 18.7 percent. Of the reported primary causes, these three categories account for 60.0 percent of the causes reported. This is indicative that untimes and emotional immaturity is that might be a significant factor of marital breakdown in Abbottabad in addition to financial hardship being a factor, there are

other factors that have not been recognized in the study such as the unchanging mindsets of the households in this district. The findings are in line with the studies done in Hazara Division and other parts of Pakistan that interpersonal and family-system are major determinants of divorce.

Infertility was given as an answer in 16.7 percent of the responses, and was thus recognized as an important cultural reason for marital instability. In-law interference (14.0

percent), and financial issues (9.3 percent) were other concerns that were reported. While financial pressures were the least cited major source in this data set, it should not be ignored as there may not be a direct link between these

vs another major cause of conflict – such as a domestic quarrel, in-law feud, and household provision expectations – but there may be a connection because often financial pressures increase other conflict.

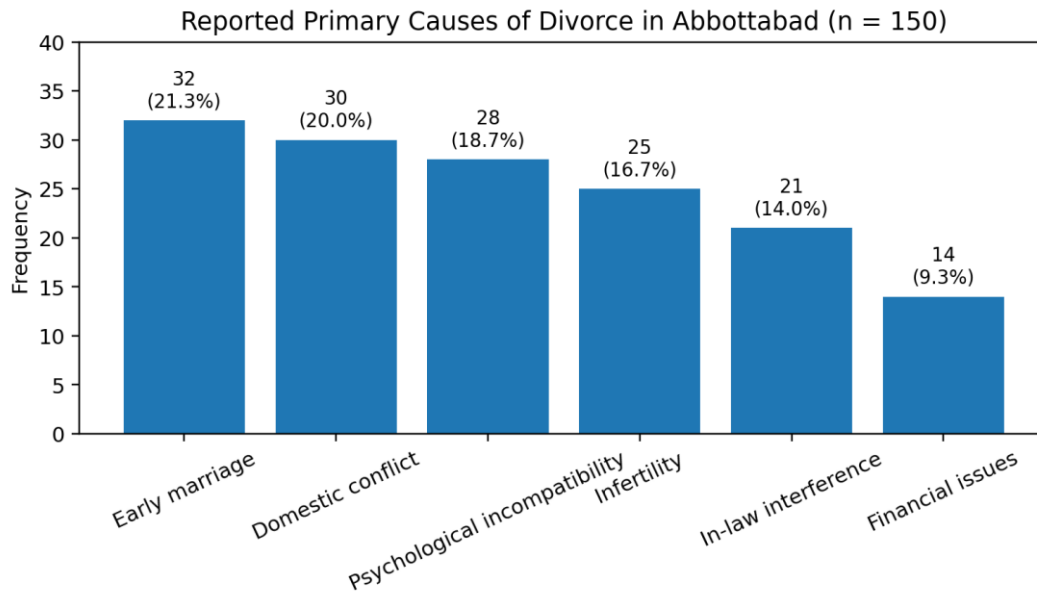


Figure 1. Reported Primary Causes of Divorce in Abbottabad

The visual confirmation is provided by the fact that early marriage, domestic conflict and psychological incompatibility are the dominant causal factors depicted in fig. 1. Distribution supports that divorce is undergoing a process of change in Abbottabad and is no longer only material or reproductive to one that is

emotional, psychological and relational. This change has repercussions for preventive actions, as in addition to laws and legal remedies after conflict has already reached a peak, new methods like premarital teaching, communication training and family mediation can also play a crucial part.

4.3 Mental-Health Consequences and Social Stigma

Table 3. Post-Divorce Mental-Health Issues and Social Stigma

Indicator	Frequency	Percentage
Mental-health issues reported	76	50.7%
No mental-health issues reported	74	49.3%
Low social stigma	43	28.7%
Moderate social stigma	58	38.7%
High social stigma	49	32.7%

Source: Field survey data, Abbottabad (n = 150).

Table 3 indicates that there were 76 responses (50.7 percent) and 74 responses (49.3 percent) associated with mental-health problems related to divorce. Don't read too much into the close parity and take it as a sign that divorce has no psychological effects. Instead, it indicates that a high percentage of the respondents' report experiencing stress, anxiety, depression,

emotional instability or distress following the breakup of their marriage(s). Legal divorce is not necessarily a beginning point for psychological distress; in fact, it may start even earlier as a result of longstanding dyadic struggles, social pressures, and/or emotional deprivation.

Social stigma was even more pervasive. 28.7 percent of respondents answered low stigma, 38.7 percent moderate, and 32.7 percent high. So, moderate and high stigma was experienced by 71.3 per cent of the sample. This result is significant, as stigma contributes to exacerbating mental-health issues, hindering the ability to access care and services, and can

give rise to a vicious cycle wherein divorced people (particularly women) aim to avoid social support and, thus, avoid stigma. Many Pakistani cultures have gender norms that mean that the lives of women are more complicated when they get divorced than the lives of men, in particular in the areas of mobility, honor and public reputation.

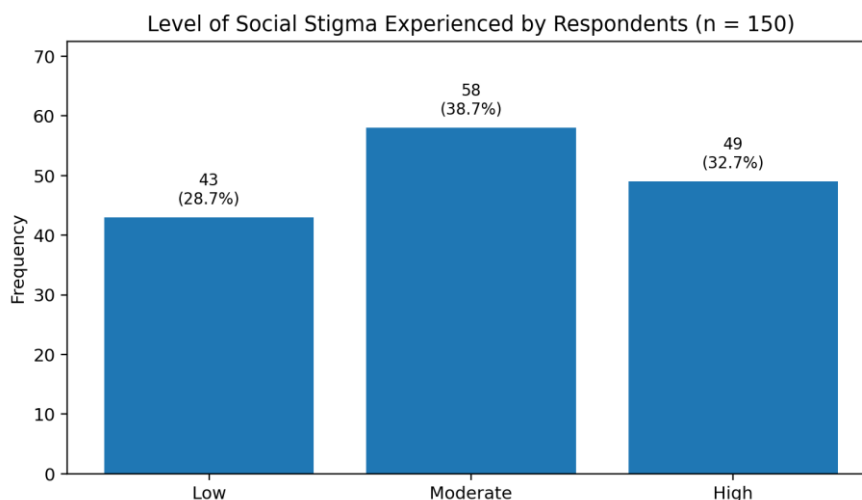


Figure 2. Level of Social Stigma Experienced by Respondents

Moderate is the most prevalent level of stigma followed by high as shown in figure 2. Thus, the figure clearly shows that the stigma associated with divorce does not exist on the margins but on the core of social consequences in Abbottabad. This is relevant to their level

interpretation at the journal level because the effects of divorce are not just psychological, but are also a product of community response, kin symbols and the social associations of marital status.

4.4 Impact on Children

Table 4. Reported Impact of Divorce on Children

Children Affected by Divorce	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	69	46.0%
No	81	54.0%

Source: Field survey data, Abbottabad (n = 150).

Table 4 shows that 69 respondents (46.0 per cent) thought divorce had a negative effect on children while 81 (54.0 per cent) did not report a direct effect. While most indicated no evidence of harm to the child, the number indicating a child impact is significant and should be noted. Emotional insecurity, divided parental attention, financial insecurity, conflict

exposure, and social labeling are all potential ways in which divorce can impact children. Research conducted under similar circumstances with children of divorced parents in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has resulted in the field of psychological and educational problems, particularly if divorce is combined with conflict and economic difficulties.

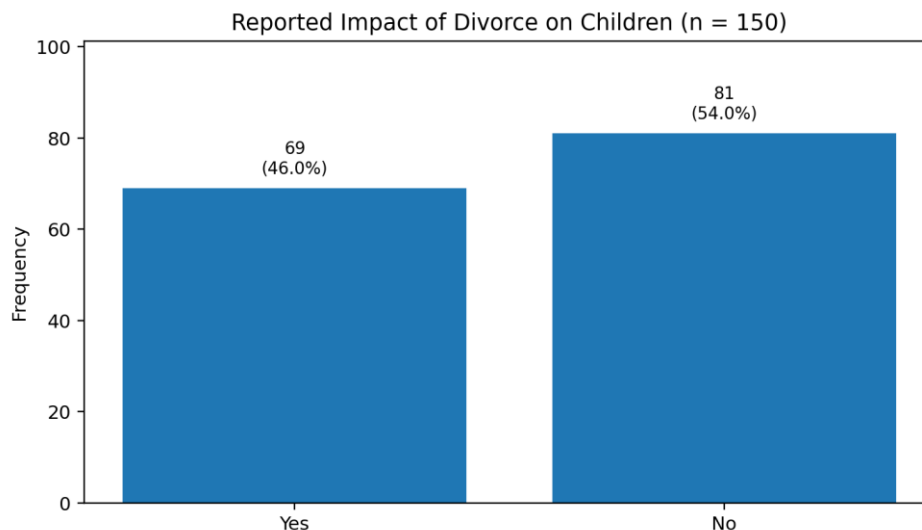


Figure 3. Reported Impact of Divorce on Children

As is seen in figure 3, almost half of the respondents thought that the child was influenced by divorce. It is important to read the findings carefully: non-appearance in the field in the short term does not exclude long-term impacts. Child effects can manifest later in the following ways: Academic drop-off;

Withdrawal; Anxiety; Behavioral change; Inability to develop healthy relationships. International study also found there is an association between parental divorce and teen vulnerability when it occurs along with bullying, abuse, neglect, and a lack of emotional support.

4.5 Role of Religion in Divorce

Table 5. Religious Guidance Sought During Divorce

Religious Guidance Sought	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	74	49.3%
No	76	50.7%

Source: Field survey data, Abbottabad (n = 150).

On their marital conflict or divorce 74 respondents (49.3 percent) had been seeking religious guidance or advice while 76 respondents (50.7 percent) were not. The near even split indicates that religion continues to play a significant role in Abbottabad but it is not a consistently formal means of mediation. Some may seek religious guidance in view of

reconciliation, moral legitimacy, and emotional support, while others may choose to avoid religion for various reasons, such as a craving for legal means of reconciliation or because of other negative perceptions about religious mediation, such as its ineffectiveness or being biased toward patriarchal interpretations.

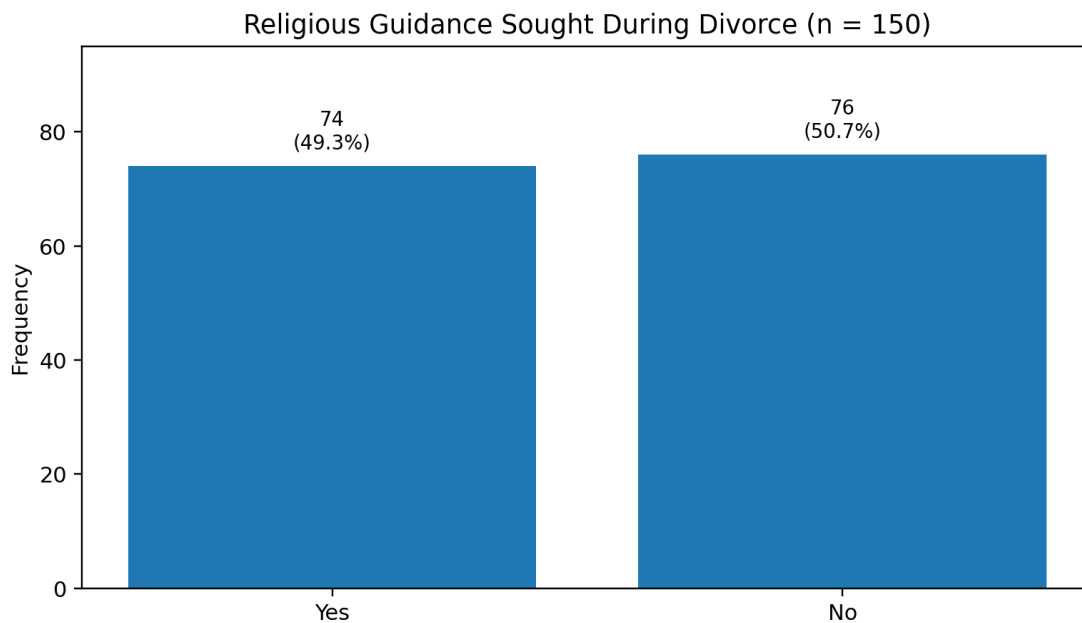


Figure 4. Religious Guidance Sought During Divorce

A transitional religious pattern is seen in Figure 4. Religion is not absent nor even preponderantly determining. Its function seems to be situational, that is, this might facilitate the process of reconciling when there is a commitment to doing the right thing with compassion, but when people feel that religious logic might worsen blaming this may be forfeited - thereby blocking the possibility of needed separation. This discovery confirms the need for trained religious counselors to help all legal and psychological staff.

Discussion

The results reveal that Divorce aspect in Abbottabad is explained via multi-dimensional approach. Immediately most often mentioned causes - early marriage, difficulties in relations with husband, lack of psychological compatibility - are indicating the process of change in marital expectations. In the initial conservative models of marriage, there are occasions when endurance and family pressure, and very even every social reputation, was more essential as compared to emotional satisfaction. Based on the current information, emotional appetite, communication and psychological compatibility have become more important than ever in deciding the fate of marriages. This goes hand in hand with the figure observed at the national level that shows how the reasons for giving up marriage have been expanding

beyond just infertility or poverty; but rather, compatibility and mutual understanding are now among them.

With the top primary cause being early marriage. This has a sociological impact because when people marry, they will oftentimes have adult roles that they take on without having the ability to plan, resolve issues or emotionally deal with the stress of marriage. If marriage does not start off properly, normal conflicts can escalate to a chronic situation. Conversely, what is known as premarital counseling should not be interpreted as it having come from the West, but as a down-to-earth family-stability effort that is sympathetic to local cultural and religious beliefs.

There is a second major cluster that is the combination of domestic conflict and psychological incompatibility. As the figures indicate, a number of divorces are related not only to material lack but to the lack of managing that takes place between the spouses and in the family in the face of disagreements. Although not the main category, in-law interference is also relevant as the local contexts where couples interact can be helpful or it may hinder the authority of the couple. Similarly, in Hazara, family interference is found to be among the main factors contributing towards marital break down.

The gendered nature of divorce is also evident. The over-representation of women in the

sample may be due to their greater willingness to talk about family harm as well as the increased social impact for women following divorce. Women can be stigmatized, mobility may be curtailed, women may be financially dependent and have difficulty reconstructing social identity. Studies conducted in Abbottabad regarding women's roles at home and outside the home, show that women still have the traditional frame to be set in opportunities and adjustment period after divorce is challenging particularly for women who have low income and limited family support.

One of the most important findings in the article was related to mental health. The majority (over half) indicated mental-health concerns, as did the vast majority (over two-thirds) for moderate and/or high stigma. This translates to the fact that the effects of divorce in Abbottabad do not stop here but get spread across with the emotional agony and social stigma. In severe cases, prolonged marital conflict, isolation and lack of support factors have been reported to be associated with higher psychological vulnerability among the women in KP. While besides clinical diagnosis measures are not taken in the present project, the descriptive results indicate the necessity of accessible counseling and mental-health interventions on a community level.

Children's experiences are considered particularly. 79% of the respondents assert that there was no significant direct impact on their children but the 21% who said that there was direct harm, suggests a serious social issue. Sometimes, children do not show up distress at once, especially in cultures that promote family privacy and respect for authority. School counseling, parental guidance and family mediation to minimize conflict exposure before, during and after divorce should be part of child-focused services.

But religion is still a dominant, though controversial, institution. It was noteworthy that nearly half of the population received, but also did not receive, religious guidance, suggesting that Abbottabad is not rejecting religion, and likely that a look into religion-seeking participants' motives may explain their judgment of when they should seek it and when not. This discovery indicates the necessity for reform-minded religious counselling, which calls for the principles of justice, reconciliation, dignity and responsible separation (in the absence of reconciliation) enunciated in the Qur'ān. Using religious mediation to coerce someone to harm themselves by entering a marriage is not acceptable, but there can be a positive role for religious mediation if combined with legal awareness and psychological support.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Table 6. Intervention Framework for Reducing the Harmful Impact of Divorce in Abbottabad

Intervention Area	Problem Addressed	Recommended Action
Premarital counseling	Early marriage and emotional immaturity	Introduce counseling through family courts, community centers, and religious institutions before and after nikah.
Family mediation	Domestic conflict and in-law interference	Develop trained mediators who can work with spouses and extended families before conflict escalates.
Mental-health support	Stress, anxiety, depression, stigma	Provide affordable counseling and referral pathways through local hospitals, NGOs, and educational institutions.
Child-focused protection	Emotional insecurity and educational disruption	Create school-based support systems and parental guidance programs for children affected by divorce.

Legal and religious awareness	Khula, maintenance, custody, delegated divorce rights	Offer gender-sensitive legal literacy and balanced religious counseling rooted in justice and compassion.
Women's empowerment	economic Financial dependence after divorce	Expand skills training, employment support, and maintenance enforcement for divorced women and custodial parents.

Source: Developed by the author from study findings and literature review.

The results from the empirical data are used to create a practice-oriented framework, Table 6. Of the recommendations, preventive counselling comes out as the most urgent, because early marriage and incompatibility as well as domestic strife are most prominent in the causal profile. Second, mental-health services need to be linked with family mediation as stigma and psychological distress can persist after the legal divorce. Third, legal and religious counselling should be synchronized to make people aware of their legal rights and moral advice in the cultural acceptable fashion. Lastly, empowerment is a must for women, because lack of financial resources may keep them in bad marriages or make divorce more difficult.

Limitations and Future Research

The study has a number of limitations. First, it presents the results of qualitative sample; in this case 150 respondents from Abbottabad only and the results cannot be generalized to the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa or Pakistan. Second, data rely on self-reported perceptions which thus may be affected by stigma, memory and social desirability. Third, observed relationships and reported patterns are only identified, but never causal relationships. Fourth, because child impact is captured as a dichotomous measurement it does not fully encapsulate the emotional, educational, and behavioral impact to children. Future studies should involve larger samples at the district level, gender disaggregation, interviews with divorced women and men, and longitudinal designs (especially those that follow families after divorce), and involve a child-focused approach. Comparative analyses with other districts of the Hazara and the Abbottabad itself could further demonstrate if

these patterns highlighted here are districtally specific or as part of a regional metamorphosis.

Conclusion

Divorce in Abbottabad is a multi-dimensional social phenomenon, causes of which have been affected by the changing expectations of marriage, family pressures, psychological incompatibility, reproductive expectations, financial stress, and an antagonistic process in religious mediation mechanisms. The findings indicate that early marriage, domestic disputes and psychological incompatibility are the most common factors whereas infertility, interference of in-laws and financial issues are still important contributing factors. These results call into account the notion that divorce has a simple explanation as a moral failure or a legal divorce. Divorce is the subject of significance. Over half of the participants reported mental health problems and the majority had moderate to high stigma. Almost half reported effects on children that are worse. Religion continues to matter but the role of it is changing—nearly half of those surveyed identified the need for religious guidance while just over half did not. The pattern indicates that the religious mediation should be more balanced, rights-based and should take into account the psychological dimensions if it is to be credible and useful in marriages conflicts. The article ends with the conclusion that abolition of Abbottabad needs a coordinated response from all actors—families, educational institutions, religious leaders, legal professionals, mental-health professionals and policy makers. Educating potential couples on the importance of premarital counselling, family mediation, awareness on laws, economic empowerment of women and support towards children would bring down the incidence of

avoidable marital disruptions and also limit the suffering of the individuals and families after divorce.

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