

Divorce, Stigma, Socio-Economic and Psychological Challenges: A Study of the Lived Experience of Women From Swabi (Pakistan)

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Abstract

Divorce is considered a social stigma in traditional societies like Pakistan, which restrains women's freedom, and sometimes, they are considered a burden on the family. There are different stigmas associated with divorce. They experience serious socio-economic consequences and are often isolated. This isolation led to psychological distress and depression, making these women more vulnerable. The studies on this issue are minimal, particularly in KPK, where such issues are always concealed and people avoid discussing them openly. So, this study aimed to explore the sociocultural, economic realities, and systematic discrimination that divorced women face. The geographical universe of the study was Swabi, and using the referential sampling technique, twelve in-depth interviews were conducted with divorced women from the Swabi district of KPK. Thematic analysis of the data was done. The findings revealed that early marriages, limited or no choice to choose a male partner as husband, post-marriage abuse, and absence of any social support were found to be the main issues reported by respondents. Even in the worst circumstances, divorced women struggled for economic stability, child rearing, and single parenting challenges, which also led to stress and depression. The stigma further adds a caveat to it. The study emphasizes the importance of community awareness and social support programs with a gender-sensitive policy reform. Women may be provided with free legal aid and vocational training to help them achieve economic independence.

Keywords: Socio-economic Factors, Psychological Challenges, Divorced Women.

Introduction

The divorce, a formal breakup of marriage, is a social phenomenon that affects couples emotionally, psychologically, and financially as well. Although this breakup affects both men and women, in traditional societies like Pakistan with a strong patriarchal structure, women bear a greater burden of this happening (Qamar & Faizan, 2021; Waseem et al., 2020). The critical challenges that divorced women face are typical gender roles, cultural norms, a lack of social acceptance for divorced daughters or sisters, and the absence of any institutional support. Although there is a betterment in the women's empowerment and they are getting acceptance in professional roles, divorce is still considered a stigma for them. Women who are divorced are often isolated and excluded from mainstream society, considered a failure, and are not provided with the same socio-economic freedom that a divorced man may have. Women who have gone through a divorce are frequently excluded, viewed as socially "failed," and denied the same social and economic freedom as men.

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This study aims to investigate the social, cultural, psychological, and economic obstacles that divorced women in Swabi face and how these obstacles affect their capacity to reintegrate into society in a dignified manner (Tabassum, 2016).

In Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the district of Swabi is renowned for its rich tribal and traditional customs. In this region, society is largely patriarchal, meaning men have more control in both home and social concerns. Traditions are expected to be followed, and family honour is highly valued (Agha & Agha, 2021). As a result, divorce has historically been stigmatized and not commonly accepted, particularly for women. In Swabi, families have traditionally planned most marriages, frequently when the bride and groom are still relatively young. Marriage is viewed as a connection between two families, as well as a personal bond. Since it is seen to bring dishonour to the woman and her entire family, divorce is typically shunned (Ali et al., 2016). Women are frequently under pressure to remain in their marriages even if they are unhappy or experiencing abuse. Swabi has rigid gender roles. Typically, men are viewed as the ones who make decisions and provide for their families, while women are supposed to take care of the house and keep quiet about their issues. Through talaq, men can quickly divorce their spouses with little to no repercussions. However, society frequently places the blame and guilt on women who attempt to dissolve marriages. Fortunately, change is occurring gradually (Ahmad & Ahmad, 2023). The media, NGOs, urbanization, and education are all contributing to the increase in awareness. A growing number of women are becoming aware of their legal rights and gaining the confidence to make their own decisions. Although divorce remains a challenging topic in Swabi, there has been some improvement.

Literature Review

Divorce occurs when a married couple ends their marriage relationship entirely, either legally or socially. Most Pakistani women are from rural areas, where they play a silent and unseen role. Divorce is a severe issue that impacts the socioeconomic standing of several societal segments. It is an international issue since it affects women's mental and social well-being in addition to their physical health. (Abraham, 2000) children. Divorce also contributes to psychological discomfort, alcohol misuse, dependence, stress, full-life desires, and vulnerability to societal economic pressures. Disagreements between spouses can be a reason why some marriages fail. In this study, I have tried to explain the social, economic, and health problems that are being faced by women who are divorced. A woman's life turns miserable when she has children. Divorced mothers must struggle hard to fulfil their children's needs, so the children do not feel the absence of their father. Women with their children also feel burdened, so their children feel inferior and lack confidence.

Divorce is not the end of the marital relationship between partners, but it has also 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 are imposed on divorced women to face unhappiness. The findings of this research are consistent with this literature in that most divorced women have experienced problems in rearing their children (Hamid, 2020). As we can see, a lot of agencies and social workers are striving to raise awareness regarding the rights of women and men, but the topic of marriage problems is not considered yet as others. The illiteracy rate is high compared to other districts, due to which they have very little knowledge about laws related to women. The consequences of divorce for women are dire, and they include emotional, social, and financial losses. Women need the love, care, and attention of their spouses. After a divorce, they cannot fulfil their sexual and emotional needs. They cannot express or share their feelings and emotions. They had many expectations and hopes with their spouses. If women feel unsafe in a marriage, they hardly go toward divorce because it becomes a social stigma at the end, and they find it challenging to face society and get humiliated. There is a lack of support for women during and after the

divorce phase. This issue should be addressed in practical ways that can help women gain more knowledge about it. There are many ways to address the divorce issue. They can launch prevention programs and counselling sessions for couples that can lead to positive outcomes. The phase of divorce can be long-lasting if not paid attention to, because at first, one might experience a lack of support from primary people, such as family and friends. With time women who are going through this phase should get psychological support and counselling which can be effective during and after divorce phase. as we know its easy sad then done, but they should empower themselves for their benefit find motivation to do something for themselves and to continue their life as before (Ramzan et al., 2018: Awan, 2022).

If we view phase of divorce in other countries, we could almost get the same ratio as our because it is a global problem America has been on record for highest divorce rate and their reasons were the changing roles of husband and wives in their house some were early marriages and financial situations all these things can lead to adverse effect on social stability and conflict among families. This is the reason divorce is considered one of the social problems, and its impact is felt by a wide range of people related to it; it is not just on couples, which causes more problems overall for them (Berscheid, 2013). When people, especially women, go through divorce, they try to deal with it in different ways. Unfortunately, due to depression, they often start to consume drugs, smoke, etc It is all because of depression, which comes along with the situation. In addition to this, we hope to gain further insight into the challenges and factors leading to divorce. In the study, a significant number of participants reported maintaining close friendships even after divorce, which served as a source of emotional sustenance during challenging times (Damo & Cenci, 2013). Couples with higher education who were married before the rise in divorce rates had a higher risk of divorce compared to lower-educated couples (Zhang, 2022). Later, the nature of this relationship has reversed, as the divorce risk for less-educated people increased excessively compared to that of highly educated people. After a divorce, women go through different phases, which are loneliness, lack of love and affection from people around, helplessness, insecurity, being overburdened by responsibilities, negative feelings towards the opposite gender, and feelings of guilt towards oneself and their children. Similarly, divorce not just leads to emotional issues but health issues as well, such as malnutrition, obesity, habits that are caused by stress, like smoking, drinking, hypertension, and many more., We hope to gain a deeper understanding of the causes and effects of things on a woman. Both mentally and physically, we also know that Women pass through plenty of emotions after divorce that constitute guilt, shame, insecurity, helplessness, and depression. They try to hide their feelings, state of sorrow, and weaknesses, and put on a face of bravery. After a divorce, women live in a stressful state of life, with many needs and desires not being met on time, which causes mental stress and invites different kinds of diseases. Psychological effects on women are profound, and long-term effects on them after divorce 72% women experience mental stress, and 28% curious about their future.

Thaseem and Jayathunga (2017) noted that divorce had negative influences on women, such as their emotional, economic, and physical state deteriorating. 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 due to the increase in divorce. This topic bears importance. Upon examining the relevant literature, it becomes clear that the causes of divorce and its impact on individuals are the most widely researched topics. In the end, we would find all the solutions to the problems faced by divorced women, whether it be physical or mental. We hope to produce a beneficial research paper that can be of assistance to those who may need it.

Objectives of the Study

The study has the following research objectives:

- To find out what divorced women face the socio-economic issues.
- To explore cultural norms that lead to the issue.
- To find out the psychological effects that women face after divorce. Moreover, the coping strategies they adopt to tackle the problem.

Methodology

The method we considered in this study was qualitative research. It helped in collecting the data from women. In-depth interviews were conducted to gain a better understanding of the topic and gather concise information on their opinions about the challenges faced by women after divorce, both societal and psychological. Divorced women were the target. The women in question were taken between the ages of 20 to 40 years. Their situational awareness was based on the challenges they faced, both direct and indirect. The sample size selected for this project consisted of 12 divorced women who had experienced such challenges after their divorce. Referral sampling was used in this research, as it was not easy to obtain information on one of the sensitive issues, which is usually considered a stigma in our society. So, women were in contact through referrals and approached and interviewed. In research about the challenges faced by divorced women, this method is helpful because it allows researchers to talk to those who are available without requiring a lot of time or resources. Although this group may not have represented all divorced women, it still helps to identify critical issues that these women face, which can lead to more in-depth studies later. Data was collected from divorced women with their approval. It was based on in-person and a few online interviews.

Data Analysis

The goal of the research was to explore the lived experiences of these women, with a particular focus on the psychological, sociocultural, and economic difficulties they encounter following divorce. The interviews we conducted with the participants total 12 in number. They were detailed, descriptive interviews, some conducted in native languages, while others were in Urdu and English. Initially, it took time to transcribe the data because some of it was in Pashto, and it was hard to find the exact wordings for their emotions and the way they shared their experiences with me. After manually transcribing the data in English, it was time to review all the interviews multiple times to grasp the concepts and gain a clearer understanding.

To understand the experiences shared by the participants, we used thematic analysis. This is a standard method in qualitative research that helps find, examine, and explain patterns (themes) in the data. The process started with a thorough reading of the interview transcripts. We reviewed the transcripts several times to thoroughly examine the information and gain a deeper understanding of the experiences shared by each person. Once we became familiar with the material, we reviewed the data and highlighted essential phrases, sentences, and stories that aligned with the common problems we were observing. We employed both deductive and inductive methods in the coding process. We began with a few expected categories based on what we knew from the context and previous studies, like stigma and emotional distress. Then, we allowed new themes to emerge on their own as we closely examined the data.

These codes helped create a framework for constructing detailed and representative themes, which are discussed in the following sections.

Results

Socio-demographic Profile

The study included twelve women from Swabi. They were mainly aged between 20 and 40 years old. Most lived in rural or semi-rural areas. Their education levels varied significantly. For example, some women had never attended school, while others had finished high school.

All the women were in arranged marriages. Several of them married when they were teenagers. Some were as young as sixteen when they wed. Most participants did not have jobs or worked in low-paying, informal jobs. For instance, one woman might work as a sewist, while another sells produce at a local market. All the participants faced emotional problems. They also dealt with money issues and social stigma. This stigma was related to their divorced status. Some of them were single mothers. For example, a single mother might struggle to find a job while also caring for her children. The family income after divorce was very low, as single mothers' incomes ranged from 15,000 to 50,000 rupees. The number of children varies from 1 to 4. Similarly, the years of marriage ranged from 3 to 15 years. Most of the women were living in a joint family system.

Insufficient Independence in Marital Choices

One clear and common topic in all the discussions was how these women had no say in their marriage options. The women in these marriages faced a complete lack of choice, which was a common problem. This lack of choice was the primary reason for most of the challenges they later faced. All participants reported that their families had arranged their marriages without seeking their approval or considering their opinions. When they were informed about their upcoming marriage, many of them were teenagers, with some being as young as sixteen. While the elders were making plans for her future, one woman recalled sitting quietly in a room. "They called me in and showed me a picture, saying, 'This is your husband now.'" That was all there was to it. Sure! Please provide the text you would like me to paraphrase. "I did not make the choice; it was made for me." "I did not understand what it meant to be a wife," she said softly after taking a moment. One participant said, "I remember crying the night before my wedding." I felt like I was disappearing, but it was not because I feared getting married. These stories focused on losing one's identity and freedom to choose, not just about weddings. Many women reported that they learned early on to hide their feelings, agree without question, and trust the advice of their families. They were told that showing respect, following rules, and being strong were more important than being happy or that love would come in time. Many of these marriages turned distant or even violent because the couples did not share feelings or understand each other. Resultantly, they felt like strangers and felt out of place in their own home, facing difficulty in developing a mutual understanding with their partner. As one respondent said, "I often felt like I was playing a role in someone else's story." I took on the responsibilities of being a mother, wife, and daughter-in-law, but I no longer felt like myself. Being denied the chance to choose a life partner caused deep hurt." They often faced blame for things they could not control at all, which made the divorce process even harder. These stories show a bigger issue in our culture where women's views are often ignored when choices that impact their whole future are being made, along with their struggles.

Marital Abuse and Domestic Violence

Tragically, reports of verbal and physical abuse occurred frequently throughout the interviews. The stories that almost all of the women described showed not a few isolated events but rather years' worth of patterns of violence. These were extremely stressful circumstances where their safety, humanity, and dignity were frequently violated; they were not just "bad days" or "marital issues." One woman recounted how her husband would hurl things across the room when he was angry, her voice trembling even as she recounted the story. It was a glass at times. It was a chair once. To avoid getting seriously harmed, I learnt how to stand in the corner with my arms over my head. After pausing, she said, "The kids would cry, but nobody came." For some, the abuse became normalized—just another part of married life. A few participants even admitted they stopped talking about it because they felt no one would care, or worse, they

would be blamed. "After a while," one woman said quietly, "I stopped crying. I would clean up my wounds, cover the bruises with makeup, and smile at the guests. That is what was expected." Nevertheless, it was not easy to leave. They remained silent out of fear of criticism and of being called "*nafrati*" (bitter) or "*beghairat*" (shameless). For the benefit of their children, out of dread of being abandoned, or just because they had been taught that a woman's fortitude was her strength, many women remained in abusive marriages. However, there was a profound strength hidden beneath these traumatizing layers.

Single Parenting Struggles

Life after divorce took on a new, even more difficult form for the women who had children, one that blended survival with a great deal of responsibility. They clarified that single parenting was about sustaining a whole life without a safety net, not only about raising a child by yourself. Despite still dealing with the scars from their tragedy, these women were supposed to be everything: breadwinners, caregivers, and emotional pillars. Their circumstances became much more distant due to social criticism. The neighbours mumbled. Family members questioned their morality. Some women described being regarded with mistrust only because they were alone and so perceived as a threat. According to one lady, "people acted like I was broken, like I must have done something terrible to end up alone." "I could sense the looks even when I was in the market with my child." Women reported that they faced difficulty while trying to get a house on rent as the landlords were reluctant to give them a home without any male person's consent or presence. As a result, the fundamental rights issue became complicated and stressful for them. Women paid a huge emotional cost for the incident. Women felt overburdened with responsibilities as they had to manage all the duties of parenting alone, and there was no one to help, protect, and support them.

Societal Judgment and Stigma

In a traditional society, being a divorced lady carried a heavy shame. Women were frequently shunned by their communities and relatives. People judged the women harshly. Their families, neighbours, and community leaders called them failures. This made the women feel very alone. They wanted to be understood and respected. "Even when I was in the market with my child, I could sense the looks." Women were under pressure due to these judgments from the social system. No one was bothering their complex struggles and did not relate it to the issue from other side, the male side, women lonely faced the weight of being called "divorced" making it stigma for them in the society, it has become more than master status for them as society is not accepting their status as women, mother, daughter or sister, she had left with only one identity that is "*Divorcee*". The stigma and judgments do not only come from society, but more from the family and social networks. These women cannot attend family marriages freely, and sometimes they are not allowed to come near the groom or bride in these functions, as they are considered "*manhoos*". These women wished to remember themselves as survivors who came out of critical situations, despite all odds; however, a few managed to stabilize their lives, becoming economically independent and taking care of their children. However, the persistent negative attitude from social circles and society reflects the insensitivity of society, which causes more emotional and psychological stress.

Post-Divorce Financial Challenges

One of the most distinguishing experiences after a divorce was financial difficulty. Finding long-term employment was challenging for most women because they had little schooling and no prior work experience. The issue that was almost a recurring theme in every person's story was that available jobs were low-paying and physically taxing. Some received added mockery for trying to work. "I had to choose between being with my children and working." Whatever

I chose, I felt like I was failing." Their vulnerability worsened due to financial instability, which also delayed their progress toward full independence.

A majority of the respondents considered divorce a financial earthquake where they had to struggle each day for their survival and the survival of their children. As in most cases, ex-husbands do not financially support the abandoned children. In the absence of parental support to register for court case for the sake of financial expense of children women had to struggle alone as one of the respondents said, "For him, kids were also died on the same day when he divorced me, he did not bother to take responsibility of children even I had not married again." The situation worsened for homemakers and women with a low level of education. For a long time, they remain in desperation and stress. One of the respondents said, "I had to travel a long distance to reach my workplace. Usually, I walk to reach them to save money for my children. I was unable to get a reasonable job due to low education and lack of experience." Resultantly, a constant emotional pressure was faced by them brought by long hours, lower pay, child care responsibilities, and stigmatization from the surroundings. The study findings show that financial struggles are not only intrapersonal, but also that interpersonal relationships, community reactions, and criticism make it hard for women to survive independently in society.

Absence of Institutional Assistance

The other main issue that seemed to be common among them was the inability of welfare, legal, and law enforcement organizations to assist them, which was a source of aggravation for the participants. Legal aid had been either unaffordable or exploitative, and police frequently rejected allegations of abuse. "Even though I was fleeing danger, they told me to go back and make it work."

Many women had trouble getting social welfare services. These services were often hard to reach, and they were not managed well. In some cases, these services did not exist.

This made it difficult for women to get the help they needed. Protection centres for women are now available in a few cities; however, due to family pressure and ignorance, they often prevent women from approaching these centres. Even police show reluctance to report and register any such cases, considering them as "domestic issues", so women remained unsafe and ignored as well. Women also reported the slow process of family courts for child custody and the expense as the central issue in the context of institutional services. The system is not supportive, and it takes too much time, so most women leave the matter and start working to support their children's education and expenses.

Religious and Cultural Manipulation

Women have frequently been shamed into staying in abusive relationships by religion and society. The theme that often stands out in most of them was that Religion and culture have usually shamed these women into remaining in violent relationships. They called it 'shame' and a different title for speaking against it. "A good wife, they said, keeps quiet and endures everything, even if it kills her." Women reported that religion was used as a tool for oppression and controlling their voices. They were taught and emphasized not to take divorce as it was considered a sin religiously. They were pressurized to be remain in abusive relationship on the name of religion, as one of the respondents said, "I was always asked to be patient as it is right of husband to control wife as per Islam so if he is using strictness on you, it is for your betterment", without social support they remained in torturous situation for a long time even some reached to the point to die as well. The sociocultural patterns and family upbringing taught girls to stay silent, obedient, and patient. Resultantly, they had to struggle even harder to come out of any abusive relationship. In many cases, women started thinking that taking a divorce or raising their voices against any abuse may be a sin, and they remained in the same

violent relationship. Sometimes they felt guilty and shamed as well, which is instilled in them by society through primary and secondary sources of socialization.

Change and Individual Development

Despite the difficulties, several participants described divorce as a growth-promoting experience. It allowed them to regain their independence, acquire new skills, and break free from oppressive relationships. Some women had taken up self-sustaining financial management, begun their first jobs, or started speaking up for others in similar circumstances. "Divorce helped me grow; it did not just break me." Those women who dare to make a decision also emerge from the situation, leading them down the path of financial independence and self-sustainability.

Table 1: Synthesis of Key Themes and Codes from Interview Analysis

Theme	Codes (Recurring Points)	Example Quotes
Insufficient Independence in Marital Choices	- Forced/arranged marriages without consent - Lack of agency - Emotional detachment	"They called me in and gave me a picture and said, 'This is your husband now.'"
Marital Abuse and Domestic Violence	- Verbal, physical, emotional abuse - Silence for family honour - Normalized violence	"I would bandage my injuries, apply makeup to hide the bruises, and greet the guests with a grin."
Single Parenting Struggles	- Dual roles - Lack of support (financial, emotional, legal) - Difficulty in basic needs (education, healthcare, housing)	"People pretended that I was broken and that I must have done something horrible to deserve to be left alone."
Societal Judgment and Stigma	- Shaming by community/family - Isolation - Negative public perception	"Even when I was in the market with my child, I could sense the looks."
Absence of Institutional Assistance	- Lack of police/legal support - Ineffective or absent welfare services	"Even though I was fleeing danger, they told me to go back and make it work."
Post-Divorce Financial Challenges	- Lack of education/job skills - Low-paying jobs - Mockery for working	"I had to choose between being with my children and working. Whatever I chose, I felt like I was failing."
Religious and Cultural Manipulation	- Use of religion to justify abuse - Cultural pressure to remain silent	"A good wife, they said, keeps quiet and endures everything, even if it kills her."
Change and Individual Development	- Gaining independence - Building confidence - Helping others	"Divorce helped me grow; it didn't just break me."

Discussion

This study used thematic analysis to look at the post-divorce experiences of divorced women in Swabi, Pakistan, in order to understand their complex circumstances better. The results, which emerge across several central themes, directly align with the study's goals and issues, shedding light on the social, cultural, and economic environment in which these women live. According to the study, support networks serve two purposes: most women reported a severe lack of support, while a small percentage received financial or emotional assistance from friends or family. For some, the only brief solace and safety came from their birth families. Others were stigmatized or rejected by the same people who were supposed to assist them.

Notably, community organizations were either non-existent or difficult to reach. These results support the goal of determining the social networks and coping strategies accessible to divorced women, emphasizing how their marginalization is frequently made worse by weak or non-existent networks (Seguin, 2016; Wilcox, 2014).

According to participant stories, domestic violence and marital abuse were significant factors in divorces and significantly influenced the women's experiences after the split. The effects of abuse, however, differed greatly depending on the woman's social background. Due to their lack of financial independence and social support, women from lower-income households frequently endured extended periods of physical, emotional, and verbal abuse. Before divorce became a last resort, many had to endure years of abuse. Due to their poor education and abilities, many women found it difficult to get employment, keep up housing, or get psychiatric support services after a divorce (Qamar & Faizan, 2021). These findings also relate to Walby's patriarchy theory, which illustrates the structural inequality reflecting male dominance in both public and private spheres. Moreover, it also reflects the intersectionality concept introduced by Crenshaw, focusing on gender oppression about class and educational inequality (Walby et al., 2012; Crenshaw, 2010). Their susceptibility frequently persisted throughout their post-divorce lives, as some were forced into unwelcome remarriages or returned to abusive family homes.

On the other hand, although women from wealthier or more educated families also suffered from violence, some were able to leave the marriage sooner because they had more personal means or more family support. Their access to counselling, legal representation, and work helped lessen some of the long-term impacts, even if they continued to experience emotional anguish and shame. This topic illustrates how structural inequality contributes to the trauma of domestic violence, achieving the goal of revealing how socioeconomic status influences the intensity and consequences of spousal abuse. It also draws attention to the alarming normalization of abuse in marriages across all socioeconomic classes, where getting a divorce is frequently the only way out, but not always the answer. The prevalence of violence prior to, during, and following marriage emphasizes the necessity of more robust institutional responses and safeguards for women from all socioeconomic backgrounds (Ahmed & Warraich, 2024; Iqbal & Fatmi, 2021).

The difficulties of single parenting, which are a reflection of broader social and cultural limitations experienced by divorced women, were one of the most urgent topics that came out of the study. Motherhood outside of marriage is frequently seen with distrust and disgrace in Swabi's traditional community. In addition to bearing the whole burden of providing emotional and financial support for their children, divorced mothers who are raising them alone also face systematic neglect, societal rejection, and condemnation. According to the participants, their ex-husbands refused to help them with shared parenting duties and financial maintenance. Despite child support laws, social norms frequently deter women from using the legal system to assert their rights out of concern about possible retaliation, embarrassment, or additional conflict. Many women also talked about feeling excluded or uncomfortable since they were single parents and were not allowed to attend school-related events or community areas.

Furthermore, after a divorce, women are expected to fulfil more caregiving responsibilities in society. Although it is expected of mothers to put their children's welfare first, they are not given much support from society in this regard—no formal childcare, few flexible work options, and little emotional support. Their capacity to rebuild their life, seek additional education, or find work is impaired, and their economic dependence is strengthened. By exploring the experiences of single parenting after divorce, this theme highlights how cultural norms and gendered expectations act as barriers to empowerment. The study highlighted the socio-cultural boundaries as obstacles in achieving independence in women's lives. Single

mothers are considered a figure of responsibility; however, they are also a symbol of failure on the part of society (Khalid et al., 2023; Jaweed et al., 2025; Qamar & Faizan, 2021).

Conclusion

This study highlighted the complicated realities of divorced women in traditional societies and cultures. The hardships of women who decided to take divorce out of the circumstances are many and are not just limited to stigmatization, lack of support, financial complexities, and legal issues. The study found that insufficient marital choices, lack of social support, strong socio-cultural norms, financial struggles, lack of legal support, and religious manipulations were the central issues of the women after divorce. However, the struggles of women also revealed their awareness, financial independence, and self-actualization as a result of the hardships they face. Many found new pathways for their life and started a journey of economic independence. According to these findings, immediate social, legal, and institutional action is needed to support and uplift divorced women and ensure that people who choose to leave oppression are not denied their independence and dignity.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations of the study:

- Offer easily accessible, private mental health therapy that is adapted to the social isolation and emotional trauma experienced by divorced women. To combat stigma and foster trust, qualified experts who are aware of the local cultural dynamics should be utilized.
- Encourage divorced women to participate in peer-led support groups where they can exchange stories, provide support to one another, and learn about their legal rights, employment options, and coping mechanisms.
- Start community-based awareness initiatives to dispel unfavourable preconceptions about women who have divorced. Encourage messages of gender equity, empathy, and respect through the local media, religious events, and educational institutions.
- To assist women in securing their financial, child custody, and divorce rights, offer free or low-cost legal services. Staff members should be trained to handle delicate cases impartially, and court procedures should be streamlined to make them more efficient.
- Establish government-sponsored training facilities that provide women with employable skills, such as teaching, digital literacy, and tailoring. To build long-lasting job pipelines, connect these programs with nearby employers.
- Talk about the abuse of religious teachings with the community and religious leaders. Urge them to speak out in their communities for compassion, justice, and the dignity of women.

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