



Causes and Consequences of Divorce: A Case Study of Southern Punjab, Pakistan

Muhammad Uzair Ashraf¹ Fahad Ismaeel² Abdul Sufwan Sattar³ Zahid Zulfiqar⁴

¹ PhD Scholar, Department of Sociology, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.

² MPhil Scholar, Department of Sociology, Bahauddin Zakaria University, Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.

³ MPhil Scholar, Department of Sociology, National College of Business Administration & Economics Lahore, Multan Sub-Campus, Punjab, Pakistan.

⁴ Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Okara, Punjab, Pakistan.

Corresponding Author: Zahid Zulfiqar, **Correspondence through:** zahidzulfiqar@uo.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan has been experiencing a growing problem of divorce, especially in the most culturally conservative area of Southern Punjab, where marriage is seen as a matter of lifetime commitment and sanctity. The current research was intended to investigate the reasons and impacts of divorce in Southern Punjab, Pakistan. Qualitative research design was utilized, and 25 divorced women of Southern Punjab were used as the data collection sample using purposive sampling. The sample of respondents was picked at Multan High Court, where in-depth interviews were conducted to explore their lived experiences of marital dissolution. The data obtained were examined through thematic analysis, and the key themes that were revealed were social, psychological, and sexual factors of divorce. It was found that socio-psychological, economic factors and marital dissatisfaction were the main reasons of the breakdown of marriage. Divorce was also identified to have dire and multidimensional effects, especially among women, such as psychological distress, social stigma, economic insecurity, and child-rearing complications. Nevertheless, among the challenges, some respondents cited such positive effects as self-awareness, independence, and legal rights awareness after divorce. The research paper concludes that divorce among women in the Southern Punjab is a complicated issue that is caused by social, psychological, and sexual factors. It is suggested that having marital counseling, mental health, and sexual education within the cultural context, and women's empowerment programs to decrease the divorce rate and the negative social effects of divorce.

Keywords: Divorce, Southern Punjab, Social Factors, Psychological Factors, Sexual Incompatibility, Family Interference, Emotional Neglect, Mental Health, Marital Dissatisfaction.

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Introduction

Marriage is a socially and legally approved relationship that is universally considered sacred. It secures the social rights of marriage and stability of marriage (Nasir and Ghaffar, 2016). Nevertheless, in modern communities, married people are becoming unable to ensure solid and sustainable family relationships because of the growth of ambiguities and social conflict. This is leading to a rise in the rate of divorce in the world. The authors note that in the Maldives, the divorce rate is 5.52 percent, 4.6 percent in Kazakhstan, 4.4 percent in Russia, 3.2 percent in China, 3.1 percent in Ukraine, and 2.7 percent in the United Kingdom (Tavakolian et al., 2023), by contrast, Qatar has reported divorce rate as 17.1, Saudi Arabia as 13.8 and Malaysia as 43.1. In the same light, Belgium has a 70 percent divorce rate, with the Czech Republic and Hungary at 60 percent. Conversely, the United States of America is ranked number six in the world in terms of divorce rates, where Chile has one of the lowest rates of divorce at 3 percent. Extramarital affairs, financial issues, communication breakdown, constant arguments, weight gain, unrealistic expectations, unwanted sexual activities, lack of intimacy, and inequality between partners are some of the significant causes of divorce in most parts of the world (Ramzan et al., 2018).

Similarly, divorce and separation are increasingly becoming a trend not only in the world but also in Pakistan. The Punjab Development Statistics Report (2022) shows that the number of registered divorce cases in Dera Ghazi Khan was 427, 2463 in Muzaffargarh, 1849 in Bahawalpur, 5335 in Multan, and 1198 and 3800 cases in Karachi. In addition, there are several causes of divorce in Pakistan, such as Watta Satta (exchange marriages), monetary issues, extramarital affairs, domestic violence, alcoholism, personality mismatch, conversion to another religion, cultural variations, lifestyle problems, and sexual incompatibility (Khan et al, 2019). Moreover, industrialization and modernization as social change have been ascertained to be a significant factor in the rising rate of divorce. Mutual respect, tolerance, and adjustment of the family have had a direct impact on this modernization (Sheykhi, 2020).

Furthermore, Siddiqui and Hussain (2023) also highlighted that married life of the Pakistani people has negative effects due to plays that are

broadcasted through electronic media. The dramas frequently depict family conflicts, spousal conflicts, unfairness, materialism, divorce, and other related issues that have an emotional impact on the audience and negative consequences on marriage in real life. In addition to this, (Saleh and Mukhtar 2015) discovered that literate women are more active in social networking sites. These platforms not only reunite them with their past partners but also contribute to illegal relationships, thus ruining marital relationships and rising divorce rates. Divorce is the legal and social termination of a marital relationship between a man and a woman; similarly, it is a social and individual problem that affects husbands, wives, children, and society as a whole. Divorce in Pakistan has far-reaching social, psychological, and sexual consequences, especially on women. The impact of divorce on women is widespread and one that can be readily observed: they become depressed, anxious, socially isolated, stressed, and lonely (Fahad and Khan, 2020). The fact that marriage is disintegrating is a critical issue among individuals and society since the family is one of the core social institutions that offer emotional support, care, and stability. Besides, age at marriage, emotional immaturity, social status, and economic conditions are also important factors that contribute to divorce. It has been shown that marital conflict and the probability of separation are higher in cases of early marriages, emotional immaturity, and financial instability (Bumpass et al., 1991; Atif et al., 2021).

Pakistan has the Family Courts Act of 1962 (amended in 1964) that governs divorce legally in Pakistan. But on a social level, divorce is still termed as stigma, especially to women. According to the Islamic view, divorce is only allowed when the harmony within a marriage cannot be regained. In such a way, divorce in Pakistan is affected by social, economic, cultural, psychological, and religious reasons (Azhar et al., 2018). On the same note, ineffective communication, unemployment, financial reliance, mistrust, forced marriage, family pressure, and cultural differences are also among the factors that lead to the breakdown of marriage (Ali et al., 2017; Rubab and Alam, 2022; Haq et al., 2020; Ramzan et al., 2018).

Divorce is well known as one of the most stressful life events that can affect emotional stability and lead to depression, anxiety, emotional imbalance and low self-esteem in divorced women (Shafer et

al, 2017). Moreover, there is a social stigma contributing to these issues, in which case divorced women are usually blamed, rejected, and discriminated against. Thus, internalized stigma causes a long-term emotional trauma (Khan et al., 2019; Zare et al., 2017). Another very important but under-discussed effect is the sexual well-being of divorced women. Following a divorce, women can be sexually deprived, insecure, and afraid of social stigma because the cultural taboos of Pakistan deny divorced women the freedom to talk about sex or remarry, hence exacerbating the psychological trauma and social isolation. Also, children are silent victims of divorce. It has been studied that children whose parents have divorced experience issues concerning their emotional, educational, and health-related well-being, particularly in situations where the parents keep fighting even after they separate (Tartari, 2015). Divorce is not only a tragedy to children but also adds pressure on women, who mostly become primary caregivers. Though divorce has always been a social taboo in Pakistan, it has been on the rise in the recent past. Research shows that women who undergo talaq or khula have more depressive symptoms, anxiety, and stress, social rejection, and economic hardship than married women (Perrig-Chiello et al., 2015; Ali and Gavino, 2008). In addition, lack of education, unemployment, and being dependent on other family members also contribute to the social, psychological, and sexual struggles of the divorced women. Thus, with the increasing divorce rate and its dire effects on the social life of women, their mental health, and sexuality, divorce has become an important social issue in Pakistan.

Research Methodology

The current research took the qualitative research design to analyze the causes and effects of divorce in women in Southern Punjab, Pakistan. The qualitative methodology was utilized to have a comprehensive view of the actual experiences of women in marital conflict and divorce. The universe of the study was southern Punjab, Pakistan. The data was collected from the Multan High Court, Pakistan. The data was collected firsthand. The reason for the selection of the Multan High Court was that many people prefer to file their cases in this court. The study population was the group of women whose divorce or family-related cases were registered at the Multan High Court. The respondents of the study were selected through a purposive sampling technique. The 25 women were picked as respondents. The structured interviews were to be scheduled on the basis of closed-ended questions, whereby the respondents were asked explicitly about the causes of divorce. The interview guide was made, and it was subdivided into two sections as the first part dealt with general demographics like age, residence, education, marital status, and family structure, whereas the second part consisted of open-ended questions relating to social, psychological, and sexual causes of divorce and its effects.

Data Analysis

The thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Responses were transcribed and coded into major themes after being transcribed. The results were categorized into three major themes, including social, psychological, and sexual issues regarding divorce.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Age Distribution of Respondents

Sr. No.	Age Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	14–20	8	32%
2	21–30 years	10	40%
3	31–40 years	3	12%
4	41–50 years	2	8%
5	50 years and above	2	8%
Total		25	100%

In this, Table 1 indicates that eight respondents were between 14 and 20 years old, while 10 respondents were between 21 and 30 years old. On the other hand, there were three respondents who

were between 31 and 40 years old. However, if we talk about the subsequent respondents, Table 1 indicates that they were between 41 and 50 years old and above.

Table 2: Educational Status of Respondents

Sr. No.	Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
1	Uneducated	9	36%
2	Primary	6	24%
3	Middle	5	20%
4	Matric	3	12%
5	F.A.	1	4%
6	B.A.	1	4%
Total		25	100%

Table 2 depicted that most of the respondents were illiterate and they constituted 36% of the total. Along with this, those who had primary education were 24% and those who had intermediate level education were 20%. In addition, respondents who had completed education up to matriculation level constituted 12%, and those who had completed education up to FA and BA level constituted 4% each. In general, the data reflects that majority of

the respondents were less educated.

Ethical Consideration

Strict adherence was made to ethical standards. A voluntary approach was adopted, whilst informed consent was taken and confidentiality was maintained. The research activities maintained the anonymity of the respondent identities.

Theme Subtheme

Social indicators	Early Marriage Domestic violence Personality Traits Patriarchy Exchange marriage Extra Marital Affairs/relations
Psychological indicators	Liking and Disliking One Partner with Another In-laws and parental intervention Sectoral Differences Mode Disorder
Sexual indicators	Sexual Incompatibility Lack of relational consistency Alcohol Addiction
Consequences	
Social	Social stigma
Psychological	Stress related illness
Financial	Mental health Lifestyle changes Self esteem Impact on children's Identity crisis Income reduction Asset division

Social Indicators of Divorce**Subtheme 1: Early Marriage**

Early marriage influenced deeply the marital relations, personal development, finances and emotional maturity. Individuals marrying at a young age usually have a problem in making joint decisions, communicating well, and resolving their joint responsibilities. Immaturity in age often leads to domestic violence and joint conflicts, which lead to inadequate and weak emotional bonds, financial difficulties, a lack of gender equality, and a lack of constructive relationships. Participant Kalsoom (19 years) girl, told her painful experience:

When I turned 17, my parents were worried about my marriage. Two months later, I got married to a 30-year-old man named Furqan from a nearby village. In the initial days, both of us faced various challenges to maintain the marital union. Behind this was my young age. I was not aware of all the

responsibilities of taking care of the house and husband as a wife. I stopped my studies to take care of the household responsibilities, and Furqan also had to struggle to find stable employment due to incomplete education, which increased the financial pressure on him. In such circumstances, both of us faced various domestic disputes and felt an uncertain outlook about our future. I wanted my partner to be my age and educated like me. Over time, we started to feel that we were weak in our life experiences and lacked emotional maturity, which disrupted communication between us and led to a complex conflict. I felt that my husband often made the household decisions, while I was not allowed to express my kingly power in decisions or my desires. Early marriage had badly affected our personal development, relationships, and dynamics in ways we never expected. We were both unhappy living together. Whenever I expressed a desire to my husband, he would always say, "I don't

understand,” “What do you know about the world,” “You don’t know anything,” etc. I started to hate my husband, and we started to conflict. Just as there was a clear age difference between us, there was also a clear difference in our thinking. He often complained that I didn’t do the housework well, and he often taunted me and said that I was incapable of managing the house the way my mother did. Our relationship began to deteriorate, and there were conflicts. I was tired of a life full of turmoil and confusion, and I could no longer live with a man whose thoughts were completely different from mine. One day, I made my husband’s favorite vegetable dish at home, but by mistake I added a little too much salt to it, due to which my husband tortured me a lot. He tortured me in front of his parents and abused me. After this fight, I went to my parents’ house. I told my parents the whole truth, and my father decided to get a divorce.

Subtheme 2: Domestic Violence

Domestic violence was one of the major indicators of divorce. The data depicted that the majority of the participants often face domestic violence such as hitting, slapping, pulling hair, strangling, arm twisting, kicking, pushing, burning, tying, etc. A woman participant, Alisha (27 years), narrated her painful experience:

I was three months old when my parents adopted me from the hospital. They raised me and supported me in my education. She got married to a distant relative in the family. On the first night, my husband stayed out with his friends and returned home late after drinking alcohol. In a drunken state, my husband demanded anal sex from me, and after I refused, he forced me to have anal sex. This was a very wrong thing done by my husband. After that, he started torturing me physically and emotionally daily. I got pregnant, and my husband declared the child illegitimate. This abuse led to divorce, and finally, I filed a case in court for separation and got divorced from my husband.

Subtheme 3: Personality Traits

Social pressures and lack of a lot of emotional support can worsen personality differences, making marriages difficult in the Southern Punjab. Sana is 28 years old and has a six-year history of marriage. She does not have children. She thinks that her personality, which is quiet, and she enjoys discussing emotions, is not the same as her husband’s. Her husband is dominating and does not

discuss emotions. Sana claimed that her husband is domineering and does not talk, and I have to communicate and express my emotions. However, with time, I ended up feeling like my own marriage was invisible. I attempted to make some compromises, but this was not successful, and I chose to divorce.

Subtheme 4: Patriarchy

Southern Punjab tends to place women in lesser positions at home, which restricts their freedom and choice of decisions. This may make marriage quite challenging, and at times, the women opt to divorce to feel independent and respected. Ayesha is a 32-year-old woman married for eight years of marriage and has two children. She believed she had been taken over by her husband and in-laws in all aspects of her life, including education and her personal decisions. She remarked that everything was decided by my husband and his family, and I did not matter. I tried to further my education, but he became adamant because he did not believe that women had to be educated. Such a life was tiresome and very lonely, and thus I decided to divorce to find honor and tranquility again.

Subtheme 5: Exchange Marriage

South Punjab is a traditional society in which exchange marriage is common. Exchange marriage is one of the main reasons for divorce in this region as well, because if there is a problem in one family, the other will definitely be affected. One of the participant Laiba (28 years), shared her painful story:

My grandfather arranged my (Watta Satta) exchange marriage with a noble and prominent family among his relatives. I was completely happy and satisfied with my husband, but my husband’s sister was not happy with my brother. They used to quarrel over domestic matters and often fought and argued. Many times this conflict turned serious, in which my family played the role of mediator and reconciled the two. My husband’s sister often complained to her brother that her husband, who was my brother, could not fulfill her basic needs and did not take her out for outings or shopping. The daily flights between her brother and his wife had destroyed their marital life. Finally, my brother divorced his wife, who was my husband’s sister, which had an impact on my marital life. My husband’s attitude started changing towards me, and due to family pressure, my husband distanced

himself from me. My husband's parents said that just as his sister got divorced, he should also divorce me on the same day. My husband tried to explain to his parents that he was a father of three children and could not afford to divorce his wife, but his family forced him to make this decision, and eventually, he divorced me, too.

Subtheme 6: Extra Marital Affairs/Relations

When a married man or woman has sexual relations with an unknown woman or man in the presence of his spouse and engages in erotic activity with someone other than his spouse, this is considered an extramarital relationship. Similarly, some of the respondents said that love is a big intention that erases modesty and plays the role of inspiration in extramarital relationships. In which the demand for sensual and emotional connection brings two strangers closer, even if they are married. Participant Shanza (32 years) narrated her painful experience:

I got married to Nawaz, and the first ten years were good and peaceful. We were in love and had four children. One day, my old friend told me that she saw my husband with a woman at the dinner table. When I asked my husband, he told me that he was with his office colleague. He would secretly talk on the phone, even at night, change the password on his phone, and start arguing with me. When I checked the phone, I found that he had been in constant contact with a woman for the last three months and had even revealed his marriage proposal to her. When I spoke to him, he became violent and beat me up and announced that he now wanted to marry this woman and not live with me. After that, our marriage ended, and we got divorced.

Psychological Indicators of Divorce

Subtheme 1: Liking and disliking one Partner with Another

For men, a partner's likes and dislikes equate to happiness and emotional attachment, which can seriously damage a marriage. If someone constantly compares their partner to someone else (friend, partner, or role model), they may feel inadequate, resentful, and insecure in their marriage. Such behavior destroys the partner's self-esteem and weakens the emotional bond between the couple. These emotional changes and upheavals can lead to serious conflicts, mistrust, and misunderstandings,

which ultimately prove to be a threat to the stability and longevity of a marriage. Participant Sana, a 26-year-old girl, shared her personal experience:

My husband Ali often compared me to a female colleague working in his office. According to my husband, she was a very intelligent and open-minded girl. My husband often gave examples of her qualities, saying that this girl has openness and professionalism that I lack, etc. My husband used to tell me that I don't like you, you are a selfish and narrow-minded girl, if I hadn't married you, I would have married this girl now. This girl has all the qualities that I like, and I like everything about her because her thoughts and mine match. This sarcastic comparison of my husband made me feel useless and weak, and this comparison directly affected our marital relationship. We used to have arguments daily, due to which my husband's mood changed toward me. There came a time when, after a fight, we would not talk to each other for several days and would avoid sitting together, which increased the distance between us. This domestic turmoil and chaos affected our trust and communication and increased conflict and emotional distance between us, which ultimately led to our separation.

Subtheme 2: In-law and parental intervention

After marriage, the interference of parents and in-laws in the domestic affairs of the married couple has a significant positive or negative effect. Seen in a positive way, they guide the married couple, help in the care of the children, provide financial support, and play their role in strengthening the two families. If the negative effects are brought forward, constant interference by parents or in-laws, unnecessary expectations, and deliberate favoritism of one person create tension, resentment, and conflict in the married life of a couple. In order to maintain a strong relationship between the in-laws, it is necessary to have clear boundaries on both sides, to adopt a positive attitude in the relationship, and especially to ensure the independence and autonomy of the couple. Participant Farhat, (32 years) women, narrated her painful experience:

My parents arranged for me to marry Shoaib, who was a private bank employee. Before and after the marriage, his parents gave me a lot of respect and love and accepted me with open hearts. My husband's parents even bought a new house for us, in which my husband and I lived in sensual

happiness, and our marital relations were full of warmth. As soon as a year passed after the marriage, questions started being asked about my ability to have children. Unfortunately, even after many treatments, I did not have a child, and this was a huge deficiency that Shoaib often felt when he saw other people's children. Despite this, Shoaib never let me feel that I could not give him children. He always supported me and always kept me happy. Shoaib's elder brother shifted to Saudi Arabia with his family. Shoaib's parents also lived with him in the house where he lived. He sold that house, and after selling it, Shoaib's parents started living with us. I always considered them as my own parents and served them and respected them with all my heart. But with the passage of time, they turned against me because I failed to give them children. Whenever my husband returned from the office, my mother-in-law and father-in-law would start conspiring against me and tell their son that your wife sleeps in her room, does not do any housework, does not feed us on time, does not take care of us, while all this was a lie, I always took care of both of them in every way. My mother-in-law started misleading my husband with this poison and did not refrain from making false statements against me. I noticed that my husband's attitude towards me started changing. When I asked my husband the reason for the change in his attitude, he told me about his parents' suspicions and also said that he should not hear any complaints in the future. One day, I respectfully asked my mother-in-law not to slander my husband and tell me about her anger, but she remained silent for a while, and as soon as my husband returned home, my mother-in-law started screaming and crying loudly and lied to her son that I had physically abused her. As soon as my husband saw his mother screaming, he picked up an iron rod without listening to me and started beating me. He was beating me continuously with this iron rod, and there was no one there to save me. During this time, the rod hit my head, which caused my head to split open, and my head started bleeding. He punched me in the face, which caused my nose to bleed, and two of my teeth were broken. Within minutes, all my clothes were soaked in blood, and I fell unconscious on the ground. My husband informed my family, so my parents immediately reached the spot, and I was shifted to the hospital by ambulance. That time was very difficult for me, but when I came to my senses, I decided that I would never live with this beastly person. He would kill me

now, and now these people have become my enemies. I knew their intentions, so I decided not to go with them and told my parents that I wanted to get a divorce now. Thus, I got a divorce and separated from my husband.

Subtheme 3: Sectoral Differences

Religious change significantly affects the married couple because the religious beliefs of both parties and the ways of worship are different which affects the married life of spouses. Conversion of religion is a serious issue in our society. When one partner changes his/her religion after marriage, he/she becomes stressed due to the change in spiritual values, traditions, and expectations in the new religion. It also affects the social relations of the spouses, the shared religious practices, and the decision-making process of the household, due to which various conflicts arise and the feeling of alienation arises. Participant Sunita, a 26 years old girl who belongs to a minority in Pakistan, narrates her painful story like this.

I belong to the Hindu religion, and I got married to Ram Lal by mutual consent. Our relationship was powerful due to our shared religion, customs, and culture. We are citizens of Pakistan, which has a large number of followers of Islam. My husband also got attracted to this religion, and after some time, he started following an Islamic religious scholar. My husband used to listen to lectures on Islam in his free time after returning from work. This tendency in my husband intensified with time, and he started going to the mosque instead of the temple for worship and took the company of the imam of the mosque. When our Hindu community came to know about this, they expressed their strong displeasure and separated from us. I tried to convince my husband not to leave his religion and separate himself from us, but he had become a rebel against his religion. One day, he also urged me to accept Islam and said that I should learn Islam with me, Islam is a very peaceful religion, etc. My husband finally accepted Islam. He started praying in front of me and started learning and reciting the Quran like a Muslim. Our community came to know about this, and my parents, in particular, protested and ended our relationship. Since my husband's new religious beliefs and practices were different from his old religion and beliefs, it hindered our daily activities and long-term goals, such as raising children, supporting the family, and socializing.

This situation was frustrating for my family. My husband tried to reconcile his faith with the converts but failed miserably, resulting in tension and emotional distance between us. Finally, due to the continued failure to resolve our ongoing conflict, due to pressure from my Hindu community, I decided to part ways. I asked my husband for a divorce, which he accepted, and I moved to my parents' house.

Subtheme 4: Mode Disorder

Rabia is a 30-year-old woman who has a one-year old child and has been married for seven years. She had mood swings and even depression, but her husband never supported her and used to criticize her for sharing her feelings. She replied that she was always called dramatic by her husband whenever she felt anxious or depressed, and her feelings were not taken into consideration. This lifestyle worsened my mood and self-esteem. I decided to divorce to avoid being psychologically unstable. When emotional troubles are not communicated and yet supported in such a situation, it may stress a marriage and the health of a person to a large extent (Zulfiqr,2021).

Sexual Indicators of Divorce

Subtheme 1: Sexual Incompatibility

Significant differences in sexual desires, needs, and expectations are often seen creating constant conflict and emotional distance between partners, leading to divorce due to sexual incompatibility. Often, one partner feels constant physical stress that leads to depression, feelings of rejection, and low self-esteem, while the other partner may feel guilty, hated, and unworthy. These issues often go unaddressed, destroying intimacy and trust between spouses, causing communication breakdowns between them, and ultimately draining the marital relationship. If the sexual expectations of the partners are fundamentally wrong, it is not possible to maintain a satisfying and harmonious relationship between them. These physical and emotional relationships eventually break down the marital relationship and lead to the decision to divorce. Participant Saima, a 30-year-old woman, agreed to share her personal experience of sexual incompatibility in her marriage.

My husband, Nadeem, and I experienced sexual incompatibility after our marriage. We were different from the first night, in our desires and

sexual preferences, and in how satisfied we were with our sex life. I wanted to have more sex and I wanted it to be more emotional than Nadeem wanted it to be; he wanted less masculine and less emotionally involved with sex. Because of the difference in sexual needs, I was feeling more and more isolated and emotionally upset. I realised that the constant frustration in me had left me feeling inadequate and doubted my will and abilities, which had impacted my self-esteem. This emotional tension led me to start showing signs of anxiety and depression. I felt a sense of isolation within myself as the lack of sexual fulfillment exacerbated the feelings of loneliness in my married life. The sexual incompatibility significantly reduced my physical and emotional closeness with my husband. I felt as if my husband did not need me. I would make myself pretty every day and wait for my husband, thinking that he would be attracted to me, but it didn't matter. The lack of intimacy weakened the emotional bond between us, which affected the satisfaction of our overall relationship. Whenever I wanted to talk to my husband about my sexual needs and preferences, he would either leave the room or tell me to stay away. The difference in sexual preferences often led to arguments and growing resentment between us. I felt that my husband did not fully understand or acknowledge my needs, which led to conflicts between us. As a woman, I was obsessive and often wanted intimacy with my husband, while my husband lost interest in physical relations due to physical pressure and changing personal preferences. The sexual differences between us not only affected our emotional relationship but also eroded the trust and intimacy between us. Ultimately, the lack of mutual satisfaction and growing dissatisfaction led to a fundamental mismatch in my needs, which resulted in my separation.

Sexual incompatibility was an incompatibility of divorce. This can manifest itself in a variety of ways, such as differences in sexual desire, preferred sexual behavior, emotional connection between the sexes, or attitudes toward intimacy. Such inconsistencies in relationships can lead to disappointment, frustration, or conflict. One respondent confirmed that she had left her home due to sexual Incompatibility. Participant Nosheen (30 years) unfolds her sore experience:

I came to know on the very first night that my husband was impotent and unable to perform his

marital duties. He came to the room, pretended to be sleeping, and distanced himself from me. With the passage of time, he started putting unnecessary pressure on me to hide his weakness. I used to face beatings and abuse from him. I belonged to a respectable family and kept quiet, keeping in mind the honor of my parents. I advised my husband many times to get treatment for male weakness, but instead of following my advice, my husband beat me and started making false and dirty accusations against me. Now, fed up with the daily domestic chaos and daily fights, I told my family the whole story, and my family filed a divorce case in the court, after which I got divorced, and I never want to see him again.

Subtheme 2: Lack of Relational Consistency

The unfaithfulness of men will break healthy relationships such as marriage, leading to a lack of stability and predictability in the most crucial aspects of relationships, such as emotional support, communication, and trust. Lack of consistency destroys trust and causes frustration that leads to misunderstanding and leaves a partner insecure, undervalued, or disappointed. This lack of consistency or change in commitment affects the balance and harmony needed for a healthy relationship. However, an inconsistency can lead to serious problems that lead to conflicts later on. Participant Nimra, a 36-year-old woman, agreed to share her personal experience:

Akbar and I were married for 9 years. Initially, my husband was kind and caring, but suddenly, without any explanation, he started shirking his responsibilities and showed no interest in our marital affairs. Akbar's emotional instability made me feel insecure and frustrated, which made me feel neglected and anxious. My husband became friends with some people who were involved in immoral activities like gambling, drinking, etc., and my husband also started taking an interest in such activities with them. We had four children, all the needs of whom were my husband's responsibility, but he became a beggar and neglected his duty, and I took money from my parents to fulfill all the needs of the children. There were daily arguments between us, due to which the domestic situation started deteriorating. My husband stopped participating in weddings and other family functions, and also limited his relations with his family. Anger grew between us, and trust in the

marital relationship weakened. Due to constant arguments and emotional distance, the stability of the marriage was destroyed, and we both separated from each other.

Subtheme 3: Alcohol Addiction

Alcoholism has a profound effect on married life in various ways, especially in putting pressure on communication, trust, and emotional connection between partners. An alcoholic runs away from family responsibilities and prefers drinking, a habit that leads to neglect and emotional distance. The alcoholic seeks to hide the extent of the addiction and the loss of self-esteem that results in the expense of the bad habit, or the legal problems arising from drunken driving. Financial stability may also be at risk due to job instability, poor performance, and absenteeism. A drunkard causes trouble to his family and even causes domestic violence in his life partner. He continues to disturb his spouse mentally and physically with his deranged behavior, which deteriorates her mental health. It is generally observed that alcoholism not only affects the alcoholic but also destabilizes their private and marital life and destroys their happy life. Participant Parveen (28 years) narrated her painful experience:

I got married to Zafar six years ago. Our married life started great. My husband was obedient to me. My husband was an employee in a factory. Whatever goods were manufactured in the factory, my husband would load them and deliver them to the local cities. After marriage, I definitely came to know that he was a smoker. After working in this factory for three years, one day my husband was accused of theft. My husband was detained by the management there, and after interrogation, he was fired from his job. The accusation against my husband was not proven true, but he lost his job. After that day, it was as if a disaster had been fallen on our house. Our problems increased day by day, and we faced severe financial pressure. My husband had a huge debt, which I paid off by selling my jewelry. We sold all the saleable items in the house, met our needs with difficulty, and arranged for food, but at one point, we had nothing to sell. During this time, my husband became addicted to drugs. Arranging food for the children became a very serious problem for us. Due to a lack of work and pressure of needs, my husband started drinking a lot of alcohol, which led to frequent quarrels in

our house. Fed up with the situation, I started cleaning people's houses, behind which I had to arrange food for the children. I used to get a monthly salary of 10 thousand, and out of this, my husband would forcefully take some money for drugs. Whenever I refused to give him money, he would beat me and abuse me. I once asked my husband to get some treatment for this drug addiction so that he could get rid of this bad habit, but he refused to listen to me and beat me and subjected me to severe physical violence. He dragged me by my hair, locked me in a room, and tried to set me on fire. Once, he tried to hang me by tying me with a rope, but it was my luck that I escaped his cruelty every time. I had lost trust in my husband and no longer wanted to be with someone who was mentally absent and an enemy to my soul. So I asked my husband for a divorce, and he divorced me.

Results and Discussion

Interpretation of the interviews of women whose marriages were divorced at the Multan High Court revealed the existence of various reasons that can lead to a collapse in a marriage and its effects (Perrig-Chiello et al., 2015; Ali and Gavino, 2008). According to the participants, social, psychological, and sexual factors played a major role in the dissolution of their marriages (Ramzan et al., 2018). Women raised a lot of concerns that involved a lifetime of discrimination and unequal treatment by gender based on gender in the setting of the family, which influenced their independence, education, and psychological health (Khan et al., 2019; Zare et al., 2017). These problems were exacerbated by early demands to do household chores, lack of freedom, and pressure from society, which influenced marital strife. In marital life, the participants claimed they experienced emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, dependence on finances, and a lack of attention to their psychological needs (Tartari, 2015). These aspects were intertwined, and they tended to grow up to matrimonial disappointment and ultimate divorce.

Recommendations

Southern Punjab has a high level of social stigma towards divorced women, because family honor is closely linked with the marriage preference of the women. The results of the present research relying on 25 divorced women whose cases had been filed in Multan High Court indicate that the pressure of

the society, patriarchal values, and lack of awareness about the legal rights exacerbate the issues faced by women in the divorce process and after divorce. The major reasons why they are in their vulnerable state are the illiteracy, the conservative culture, gender discrimination, ignorance on their rights as a woman under the Islam and the Pakistan law.

On the findings, it is proposed to recommend as follows:

- Introduce community awareness campaigns about women rights and legal protection of the women who are divorced.
- Implement rigid legislation against family violence, emotional, and coercive abuse of women to safeguard women in marital affairs.
- Enforce gender equality policy to minimize systematic discrimination and make sure that women right equals that guaranteed by the Constitution of Pakistan.
- Establish rehabilitation and empowerment strategies to help the divorced women acquire vocational skills, education and economic independence.
- Enact policies that would enable women to maintain self-sufficient lives following divorce such as financial assistance, job creation, and empowerment.

Conclusion

The paper discusses the causes and consequences of divorce among women of lower and middle classes in Southern Punjab with the help of 25 divorced women registered in Multan High Court. The findings suggest that patriarchy, rigid gender roles and social expectations lead to emotional neglect, abuse and restricted freedoms. Divorce is a stigmatized act in society, but many times it is a move that women have to take to gain dignity, psychological stability, and freedom. The decision to leave a marriage was not easy for the participants. They were afraid of losing their children, were not approved by other family members, and experienced societal rejection. Nonetheless, in case of emotional or physical incompatibility of marital conditions and lack of familial support, women resorted to divorce. Divorce was defying conventional beliefs about family honour, and females had to deal with the stigma of society, at the same time, putting their own safety first. To most of

the participants, home turned into a place of comfort to a place of fear, humiliation, and emotional pain. Divorce was a loss and a step towards regaining self-control, stability, and honor.

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Conflict of Interest

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