

# Impact of broken relationships on social and psychological health of women in Pakistan

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**Abstract** – The marriage is binding of two people to a sacred relationship a legal relation accepts by society and divorce is legal termination of this relation. Widow is the women who have lost her husband. In Pakistan, there are national organizations, principles and practices that undermine women's independence and subsidize to gender-based violence. It is important to be aware of the consequences that the women have to face after divorce and after the dead of her partner which include social and psychological health. The aim of this study is impact of broken relationship on social and psychological health of women in Pakistan. Primary research data was collected by using a questionnaire. The questionnaire contained close-ended questions. Inferential statistics were used to determine the association of broken relationships on psychological and social health of women. 85.7% women faced difficulty to settle on their own. 71.4% of women went through depression affecting their mental health. Due to social stigma, about 71.4% women suffered from mental health problems. The findings in this study point at the multiple forms of broken relationships that Pakistani women face which cumulatively contribute to the development or continuation of different forms of psychological stress and serious mental ill health.

**Keywords** – Divorce, Widow, Pakistan, Survey, Psychological health, social stigma

## 1. Introduction

The marriage is binding two people to a sacred relationship, to be there for each other when times gets rough as well as in good times. It is a legal relationship that is supported and accepted by the society. As wonderland heaven, it feels like not all marriages are as happy of a place and can end up in divorces in some cases. Some marriages build individuals others can also completely broke someone, their peace of mind and can even impair their ability to perform daily activities. These kinds of marriages that end up in divorces can also have long term post trauma impacts on women [1]. Not only divorce but also the death of significant other can cause mental health problems such as depression.

Social relations, both quantity and quality, affect psychological wellbeing, health behavior, physical fitness, and death risk. Sociologists have played a key role in creating the link between social relations and health conclusions, identifying descriptions, and determining social discrepancy (e.g., by gender and race) at the population level. Social relationships have short- and long-term effects on health, for better and for worse, and these effects emerge in childhood and cascade throughout life to foster accumulative benefit or difficulty in health [2].

In Pakistan, there are national organizations, principles and practices that undermine women's independence and subsidize to gender-based violence. Matrimonial practices

can disadvantage women, particularly when responsibilities such as wedding gift and wife's price, *Watta Satta* and marital to the Quran (a tradition in Sindh where daughters continue unmarried like nuns to preserve family possessions in the family) exist. In recent years dowry has turn out to be the predictable part of wedding. This snowballing demand for dowry, both before and after marriage, can heighten into annoyance, bodily violence and emotional manipulation. In extreme cases slaughter or "stove-burns" and perversities can deliver husbands an opening to pursue another marriage and therefore more dowry.

Women are limited to abusive relations and lack the capability to escape their captors due to social and cultural pressures. Parents do not inspire their daughters to return home for fear of being denounced as a divorcee or a widow, which is equivalent to being a social exile. Moreover, if a woman leaves her husband, her parents have to repay him to compensate his loss. Traditional attitudes towards female chastity and male honor serve to defend violence against women.

Violence against women is very common in Pakistan. The defilement of women's rights, the discrimination and prejudice are obvious in many cases. A United Nations research study found that 50% of the women in Pakistan are tangibly maltreated and 90% are mentally and orally abused by their men. A study by Women's Division on "Battered

Housewives in Pakistan" reveals that domestic violence takes place in almost 80% of the households. More recently the Human Rights Commission report states that 400 cases of domestic violence are reported each year and half of the fatalities die.

Divorce is the legal termination of the marriage. Even though the divorce is a legal right; it was not accepted by society as a good thing and were frowned upon. If we talk about today, it is not frowned upon like before but still some people see it as a bad thing and it comes with all of burdens and consequences both mentally and physically [3]. Apart from divorced women, mental health of a widow is even less talked about, a widow's problems and burdens are somewhat similar to divorced women. It is important to be aware of the consequences that the women have to face after divorce and death of her partner which include psychological pain, stress, problem of remarriage and the social issues. Women suffer more both mentally and emotionally. But that is not all sometimes coming out of an abusive and violent marriage can be healthier than staying in one [4]. In a study researcher from the university college London and Binghamton University asked more than 5,000 participants from 69 countries to rate emotional and physical pain of a broken relationship on a scale of 1-10. They observed that the average of emotional pain seen in women were 6.84 and physical pain 4.21 which is greater than found in men. It was further explained that women suffer more because they are more invested in relationships both mentally and emotionally [5].

Social Problems involve Discrimination, rejection and segregation by Family and Friends. If we talk about divorce women in Nigeria; divorce women are not socially accepted and respected there. Even close friends avoid divorce women saying that they are evil and not good for married women. They believe that divorce women have negative influence on others and are often avoided by others, they are even avoided by their family members instead of providing divorced sister, daughter or mother with support and comfort. The Igbo tribe have a custom that the property is only given to male child so when divorce daughter comes to her father's house, she faces segregation and rejection so that she does not claim her father's house or property. If a divorced woman has children the concept of remarriage becomes even less because of which they suffer from rejection from their friends and family and get traumatized emotionally, psychologically and financially.

They also suffer from Job Discrimination, Denial and Hostility at Workplace. Divorce women as well as a widow often face job and hiring discrimination as it is perceived that they cause distortion in workplace and are troublesome. It is really challenging to be at the receiving end of such discrimination and be mentally stable. They also have to handle office gossiping; name tags surround the divorced women an isolation at work pace can be a big blow to their mental health. Divorce women also suffer from societal antagonism and in many occasions, they are isolated or excommunicated [6].

In Pakistan, societal approaches and norms, as well as cultural practices (exchange marriages, dowry, etc.), play a dynamic role in women's mental health. The religious and ethnic conflicts, along with the brutalizing attitudes towards women, the lengthy family system, role of in-laws in daily

lives of women, characterize major issues and stressors. Such practices in Pakistan have created the dangerous marginalization of women in plentiful spheres of life, which has had an adverse mental impact. Ferocity against women has become one of the acceptable means whereby men exercise their culturally constructed right to control women. Still, compared to other South Asian countries, Pakistani women are relatively better off than their counterparts.

In 2019 in Karachi 11,143 cases filed, 2020 first quarter 3,800 cases filed, one and half year forgoing to June 2020 cases filed were 14,943; out of which 4,752 prepared of effecting 2,000 women divorced in 2019 affecting 2100 children [7]. Suffering from a break-up is related to an increase in emotional distress and a decline in life pleasure (from pre- to post-dissolution). However, some features of the relationship or of the break-up are linked with the greatness of the deviations in life happiness following a break-up. Precisely, having been sharing and taking plans for marriage are related with bigger failures in life contentment while having begun to date someone new is associated with reduced drops [8].

Mental health is essential machinery that works in show with each of the other machineries to shape corporeal health. For instance, the motive care delivered by social ties improves emotional well-being, which, in turn, may reduce the danger of morbid behaviors and poor physical health. Furthermore, mental health is a central fitness outcome in and of itself. The World Health Organization recognizes mental health as an important dimension of complete health status. However, the predominance of mental disorders and their consequences for individuals and societies are often underappreciated [9]. Acknowledgement of protective demonstrative distress during gestation and the documentation of risk factors for distress are of significant clinical and public health status. The mental health of the women is important both for physical and mental condition of her children and the wellbeing of the family [10].

The urban Pakistani women in many aspects are nearly equal with the women of advanced countries. In the rural scenario, the picture is entirely different. It is ancient, brutal and clearly repressive. These trends often seep into the urban lives of women through migratory movements of rural population, which has yet to adjust to urban ways.

The marriage is binding two individuals in a sacred relation; it's a legal relation whereas divorce is termination of this relationship. In many researches the researchers have concluded that women suffer more from a divorce than men as they are more emotionally invested in relations than their male partner. They suffer financial, have fear of being on their own and lack self-esteem as ladies. This article focuses on the effects of broken relationship on woman's physiological and social health after she loses her significant other or gets divorce.

### 1.1. *Data Already Known*

In Pakistan, societal attitudes and norms, as well as cultural practices play a vital role in women's mental health. The religious and ethnic conflicts, along with the dehumanizing attitudes towards women, the extended family system, role of in-laws in daily lives of women, represent

major issues and stressors. Such practices in Pakistan have created the extreme marginalization of women in numerous spheres of life, which has had an adverse psychological impact. Violence against women has become one of the acceptable means whereby men exercise their culturally constructed right to control women. Still, compared to other South Asian countries, Pakistani women are relatively better off than their counterparts.

Social and self-stigma which threatens their psychosocial wellbeing and self-esteem are other problems leading to several health problems in women. They use defensive response mechanisms and social support to mitigate these effects. Education focused on coping strategies might be helpful against such stigma.

Marital circumstances have been indicated to be a salient risk factor for disproportionately high prevalence of depression and anxiety among Pakistani women. Although social support is a known buffer of psychological distress, there is no clear evidence as to how different aspects of marital relations interact and associate with depression and anxiety in the lives of Pakistani married women and the role of social supports in the context of their marriage.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Data Collection

Primary research data was collected by using a questionnaire. Google forms were distributed via the internet to different internet-based platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram.

A total of 7 females participated in this study the women were either divorced or lost their significant other. Data confidentiality and compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki were ensured.

The questionnaire was a structured questionnaire that had a total of 12 questions; the questionnaire contained both close ended and open ended questions. The questions targeted three different aspects related to broken relationship and health of women.

### 2.2. Analysis

Inferential statistics were used to determine the association of broken relationships on psychological and social health of women. Received data from the questionnaire was carefully recorded and results were analyzed.

## 3. Results:

All Participating women (n=7) were in the age group 21-40; having different reasons for their divorce or separation that includes:

- Conflict and arguing
- Financial problems
- Substance abuse
- Domestic violence
- Because of in laws
- Did not get divorce rather husband died due to attack heart
- 2nd marriage without knowledge

### •Cause husband was alcoholic

85.7% women faced difficulty to settle on their own. 71.4% of women went through depression affecting their mental health whereas only 28.6% were strong enough to handle their trauma. Like in many developing countries as well as in Pakistan, about 57.1% of women were forced to get married again and many of them received the social stigmatization of being in a love affair. Due to such stigma, about 71.4% women suffered from mental health problems and it became even worse when they found themselves in financial crisis and a burden on family. Consequently, in about 57.1% of the women social drawbacks were observed, but there were only a small number of women who has not gone through any social drawbacks.

At which age, you get divorced or separated?  
7 responses

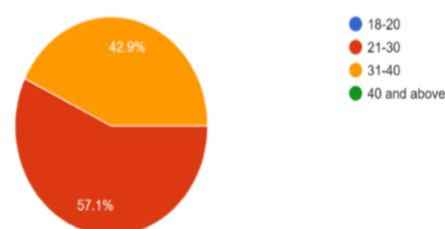


Figure: 1 the above pie chart shows that about 57.1% women got separated in their mid-twenties and 42.9% got separated in their mid-thirties.

What forced you to get divorce?  
6 responses



Figure: 2 In above pie chart one of the respondents prefer not to share her reason of getting divorced and there 6 respondents gave different reasons, according to above pie chart there are total of 8 reasons why women get divorced and all of them have equal percentages means that there is not a single but many factors that contribute to women getting divorced.

Was it hard to settle down on your own?  
7 responses

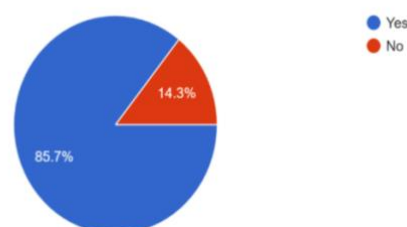


Figure: 3 about 85.7% women found it hard to settle down alone on their own which is a rather big percentage of women who did not receive any help and had to handle everything on their own and only about 14.3% responded in no that they did not have a hard time settling down.

Did you go through depression?

7 responses

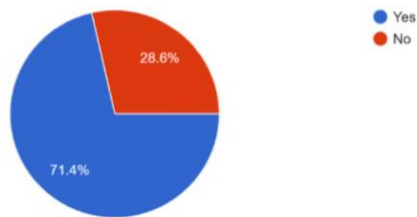


Figure 4 About 71.4% women got through depression and only about 28.6% were mentally stable.

Were you forced to get married again?

7 responses

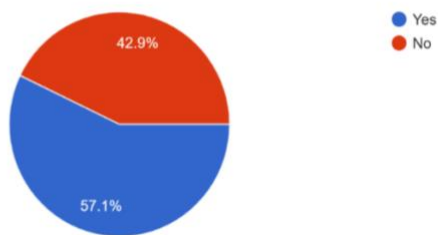


Figure: 5 about 57.1% were forced to get married again as their parents and relatives believes that a women cannot live alone in Pakistani society and only about 42.9% women were not forced to get married.

Did you receive any social stigmatization?

7 responses

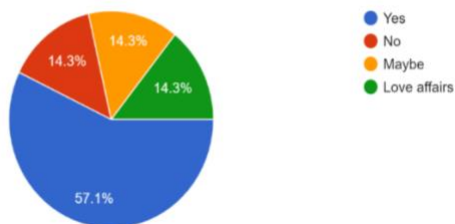


Figure: 6 pie chart shows that about 57.1% women were socially stigmatized, we also asked them if they will share with us how society treated them only one of them shared that she was accused of having a love affairs with different people and only about 14.3% women did not receive any kind of social stigma.

Did anyone support you?

7 responses

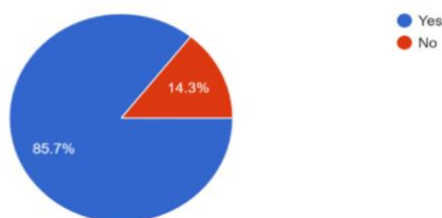


Figure: 7 85.7% women receive support from their parents, relatives and friends, which is mostly because of their family system as well as high literacy rate in their families.

Did your mental health get better or worse?

7 responses

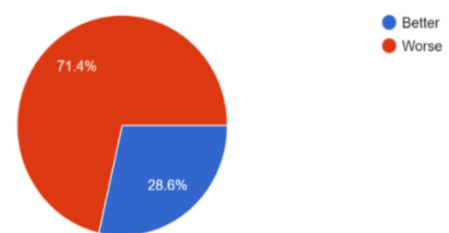


Figure: 8 A majority of the respondents answer that their mental health got worse after getting divorced and losing their significant others

Did you notice any social drawbacks in yourself?

7 responses

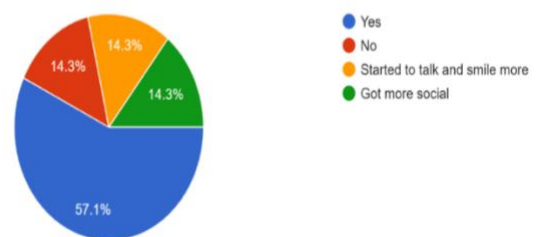


Figure: 9 14.3% women answer that they did not notice any social drawbacks in themselves, about 14.3% answered that they started to smile more, 14.3% answered that they got more social and a majority of women said yes that they notice social drawbacks in themselves.

#### 4. Conclusion

The findings in this study point at the multiple forms of broken relationships that Pakistani women face which cumulatively contribute to the development or continuation of different forms of psychological stress and serious mental ill health. In this study we found that factors like social stigma, financial crisis, forced to married again, and depression contribute to mental and social health problems. Further studies are needed to confirm our findings, qualitative and quantitative, to gain detailed knowledge and understanding of women's overall life circumstances and mental health outcomes. Few exposed women sought health care, social care or legal support, which reveals a lack of reliable institutions to which women could turn.

The present situation in relation to relationships toward Pakistani women requires urgent attention at all levels of society by policy makers, political stakeholders at the macro level and health care and NGO professionals at the micro level, to improve and safeguard women's overall life circumstances. Women should be offered the possibility to report incidents without fear of repercussion and to receive high-quality health care and social support when seeking support due to victimization. Currently many health care providers, do not query women about problems exposure and are poorly prepared to respond to the needs of those exposed.

In parallel to all these health care and service-level interventions, there is an urgent need to improve gender equality at the societal level. Programs designed to change norms and shift beliefs about women, men and family relations should be put in place encouraging a public or semi-public dialogue about the married life and their consequences. The mass media should be encouraged to generate a public debate on the serious gender inequalities

that exist in the country, condemning such violations and exposing their serious public health effects.

## 5. Discussion

Our findings provide new information that suggests a high prevalence of a variety of mental health symptoms, including suicidal thoughts, and demonstrate strong associations with all forms of mental breakdown among Pakistani women. There was a more than 4-fold risk increase of negative thoughts for women exposed to any of the forms of relationship damage investigated. This provides indications of victimized Pakistani women's seriously impaired mental health status, with society offering few options for help and support.

'Problems in performing usual activities', 'difficulties in decision making', 'loss of interest in previously enjoyable things', 'feelings of worthlessness', 'memory and concentration problems' and 'suicidal thoughts' are six symptoms that signal depression, and many women undergo through this. As these symptoms were commonly reported by the women subjected to divorce or separation in this study, it seems plausible they would have been diagnosed with clinical depression had they sought health care? The women exposed to physical violence before being divorced reported 'extreme memory or concentration problems', which might be an indication of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder or even minor brain injury.

'Feelings of worthlessness' might also signal lowered self-esteem. 'Culture', a localized system of ideology, roles, activities and their interrelations, also operates at the macro level and contributes to the construction of gender roles. Pakistani women from low-income and middle-income families live with multiple stressors related to different levels in the ecological model, such as forced marriages, dowry and restricted mobility, which affect their education and work opportunities.

Women are often excluded from domestic decision making, yet confined to the domestic sphere, responsible for housework for the entire extended family. The civil unrest currently present in the country with compromised personal and family safety may also limit families from engaging in activities they enjoy outside of the home, thus adding to already existing psychological stress in women.

Women are in an inferior position to men in the Pakistani society; women's overall life circumstances are characterized by serious gender inequalities with limited possibilities to leave the marriage. Men's violence against women within marriage is further accepted as part of the cultural norm, particularly by older and poorly educated women. The power imbalance between husband and wife may well explain symptoms of depression and also the high occurrence of suicidal thoughts in married women, whether or not exposed to any form of violence leading to separation or divorce.

## Declaration of Interest Statement

Authors show no conflict of interest.

## Acknowledgment

The author would like to acknowledge National University of Medical Sciences (NUMS), Punjab

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