

## **RESILIENCE AND COPING STRATEGIES OF DIVORCED MOTHERS IN PAKISTAN**

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*The study explores the financial and socio-economic challenges of divorced mothers and what coping strategies they used to overcome these challenges over time. The study then also delves into how cultural and social norms affect their experiences. A qualitative approach is used in this study. The study involved 10 divorced women participants; they were selected through snowball sampling. The data was conducted using semi-structured interview guide and after that the data were analyzed using thematic analysis, resulting in 6 main themes and 12 sub-themes. The findings of this study showed, their coping strategies are religious affiliations such as reading Quran, pray; wazifa's and having faith on Allah, taking practical steps such as self-sufficiency, second marriage, rearing children, learned skills, they also utilized their education for earning and job mostly as a housemaids, societal support such as support from family, welfare and neighbors and lastly they cope through emotional support such as crying, sharing their sorrow with others. . The overall message of this study is after divorce the journey of life doesn't end but woman can rebuild her life if she gets proper resources, support and have self-confidence.*

**Key Words:** *Divorced mothers, Coping Strategies, Resilience, Social Judgment, Strength*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Marriage is a strong relationship between two individuals who support and fulfill each other needs and it is built on mutual understanding with the expectation of having a loyal and positive connection. (Cabilar & Yilmaz, 2022). Divorce is a process of legally ending the marriage, where the partners were separated officially. People can be affected by the process of divorce in many ways including, emotionally, legally, financially and socially. There are many reasons for divorce and it impact differently for the people involved, such as families, children, adults and parents (Billingsely et al., 2020).

The global rates of divorce were changed and increasing overtime and differ across countries (Ospina & Roser, 2024). Benson, 2023 study that Western countries like, United States, Australia and Canada have higher divorce rates but in recent years the divorce rates have declined. In Northern European countries like Denmark and Finland have seen higher divorce rates and in Eastern European countries like Ukraine and Russia have seen traditionally increasing divorce rates and in Southern European countries like Greece, Spain and Italy traditionally have been seen lower divorce rates compared to Northern Europe but in recent years the rates have been increasing because of cultural views and acceptance of divorce. In Asia and Middle East countries traditionally have lower divorce rates because of their strong religious and cultural impacts on

marriage, while in countries like Japan, China and South Korea are suffering higher divorce rates due to their traditional views shift. Lastly, in African countries traditionally have lower divorce rates but societal norms and economic development leads to more divorce rates in some countries.

According to (Hutasoit et al., 2024) and (Ahmed & Riyaz, 2024), there are many reasons for divorce which may include, economic problems, domestic violence, jealousy, feeling of superiority, financial independence of women, communication issues, infidelity, lack of premarital education and early marriages. These causes lead to emotional distress, increased risk of divorce and development delays on child also emotional toll, financial strain and changes in social status on spouses and divorce also effect extended families and society such as shift in family dynamics, family support and burden, economic costs, social stigma and changing norms (Ali et al., 2016). Ghaboush, Al-Qdah & Jomah, 2020 and Odis, 2021, identify several consequences of divorce on mother and children. Children might confront emotional distress, social, economic and psychological challenges, loss of family structure and tradition like increased risk of aggression and violence, impact on academic achievements and physical health, living arrangements and social adjustments. While mothers might deal with financial burden, psychological, emotional challenges, economic pressures and child labor, social challenges like lack of social support and coping mechanism, health consequences and lastly behavioral changes like parenting style etc.

In Pakistan, divorce is a legal termination and official dissolution of a marriage by the court decisions or other legal processes. Some people sees divorce negatively because of its effect on family dynamics and social norms, while other people sees divorce as a crucial step for individual liberty, offering a way out of unhealthy or unsafe marriages and seek more purposeful lives (Akhter & Ummara, 2024). According to Islam, divorce is legally acceptable but at the same time it is strongly opposed in Quran and Sunnah because divorce is a serious and unacceptable act and divorce should be only resort as a last option after all the attempts have been made for settlement. (Rashid, Khuhro & Ahmed, 2023).

Khan, Sikandar & Akhlaq, 2019 finds that in Pakistan, divorce rate has been increasing rapidly and as a result it develops number of issues as consequences. Their study revealed several causes of divorce including intimate partner violence (IPV), in-laws interference, another important reason for divorce is temperamental mismatch, and other important causes of divorce are sexual dysfunction and extra marital affairs. While Rubab & Alam, 2022 explore some other factors which cause divorce are economic, social, religious, political, cultural and psychological issues. The primary reasons for divorce are early marriages, forced marriages, love marriages, lack of education, patience, trust, communication, employment and awareness, patriarchy (where male dominate), dowry issues, religious factor like partners from different sects such as Shia or Sunni and lastly media play vital role in divorce because it shape people's opinions and cause many issue between couple such as domestic violence.

There are number of researches exploring the effects of divorce on the women, children and their families. But only a few studies have seen the socio-economic effects of divorce and gender dynamics in experiencing the divorce, i.e., Social stigma, financial constraints and societal

pressures. Therefore, the present study explored the experiences of divorced women having children, and their coping strategies, to manage their life and the lives of their children.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To explore the Socio-economic hurdles faced by divorced mother
2. To find out the coping strategies used by divorce mothers
3. To analyze how cultural norms, and societal expectations effect the experiences and resilience of divorced mothers

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Globally, the divorce rates are increasing day-by-day and Middle East is a part of this trend (Mendoza, 2023). Many studies have analyzed various socio-economic reasons of divorce in different countries. In Indonesia main reasons for divorce are unemployment, economic strains, domestic responsibilities, and extra-marital affairs. While in Iran and India, daily expenditures, educational levels of men and earning disparities, and 21-30 age group people were more susceptible to divorce. In Israel and United States, women's financial independence and workplace participation were main reasons for divorce (Asghar, Salma & Mumtaz, 2024).

A research conducted by Mastai, 2019 & Mkumbwa, 2023 showed socio-economic challenges experienced by single mothers in Zimbabwe and Tanzania and the major challenges are financial strains and inflation, informal employment and low income jobs such as bartending and catering, lack of support system or resources and poor housing condition these challenges contribute to social issues like social stigma and discrimination, family conflicts, effect on child development, negative societal opinions double parenting role such as primary caregiver and breadwinner and lack of government support and welfare. While in some other economic challenges are financial dependency and mental health issues (Jain & Mehmoodi, 2022) and mothers have to struggle to provide for children and balancing domestic duties and workplace in Bangladesh (Khan et al., 2022).

Khalid, Saleem & Ghani, 2023 explains in their study that in Pakistan, divorced women have to encounter several challenges which impacts on their willingness to start a new beginning such as issues like unsuitable job proposals and negative gossips, workplace sexual harassment, lack of emotional and psychological support which lead to face mental trauma and anxiety. According to Akhtar et al., 2024 only few communities show empathy and support while most of community perceptions emphasis on negative impacts of divorce and these perceptions make it difficult for divorce women to access support and easily relive their live. In Muzaffar Garh, the rising divorce rates are associated with socio-economic challenges such as society and money. Ajaz & Tabassum 2022, in their study discusses increased vulnerability of single mothers and three key vulnerabilities faced by single mothers were identified in their research. Firstly, social vulnerability like loss of traditional security networks such as support from their husbands and families, secondly, economic vulnerability such as burden of handling financial responsibilities

alone and lastly, health vulnerability such as stigma associated with their new social status and iddah restrictions cause many physical and mental health problems.

According to prince et al., 2010 coping refers to what efforts people put to deal with the stressor. Coping strategies divorced mothers used are active problem solving and cognitive engagement in managing emotions and problems and dependent on avoidance coping strategies and support from family and friends which help them in child rearing and often associated with less authoritative parenting style (Holloway & Machida, 2008). In Turkey and Serbia, coping mechanisms employed by divorced mothers are they have increased their working hours and they do multiple jobs at a time to cope with their financial constraints, while some women rely on their children for financial support, some women show self-sufficiency & lower consumption and they believe in their abilities and with low income they still manage their finances and don't want to depend on others, some of them are engaged in income-generating activities and community support helped them to be independent (Barlin et al., 2021).

However, in Maldives, most of the utilized coping resources by divorce mothers were family support, employment dependency, social support from neighbors or friends and look for financial independence through skill development (Aboobakuru & Riyaz, 2021). A study by Emmanuella, Adangabe & Kazi, 2022 revealed that in Asogli state divorced mothers used variety of coping strategies including basic survival such as borrowing money, overworking harder (doing 2/3 jobs daily to meet basic needs) and emotional resilience such as freedom from abusive relationship and dependent on family support. Gericke 2017, finds different range of coping strategies used by divorced mothers such as emotional coping strategy like they explain their relationship with God, religion and spirituality is important aspect for them, behavioral coping strategy like after divorce being independent and self-sufficient and economic coping strategy like maintenance money from their ex-husband for child.

In Pakistan, women cope with their challenges differently, where some of them showed strength in their resilience, self-acceptance, being empowered, some rely on support system such as friends, neighbor, family and counseling groups, while spiritual practices such as guidance from religious activities etc provide additional comfort for some women and these are crucial for their well-being and emotional support (Razaq, Zulfiqar & Gul, 2024). In workplace, the major coping strategy used by divorced mothers are avoiding the situation or keeping their identity secret (Saeed, Kehkishan & Sameer, 2022).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study used some sociological theories to understand the experiences of divorce mothers, what changes have occurred in their life, how they made themselves strong and what kind of strategies they used to cope from difficult situations. Social role theory was developed by Alice Eagly in 1987, which integrates society have created social roles for both male and female, which are societal not biological. For instance, from men, it is expected that they should be strong, dominant and breadwinner of the family while from women, it is expected that they should be soft, sacrificial

and caregiver of the family. These social roles have a strong impact on controls and decisions of women's lives (Barbara et al., 2020).

Empowerment theory was presented by Julian Rappaport in 1981, which states that, people should have given decision-making right, authority, autonomy, control over their own lives and become self-confident citizen, so they can better manage their life in the society. The empowerment theory not only represents the individual strength but also it is a step towards societal change (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Feminist theory was developed by many intellectuals and the formal idea of this framework was strengthened in 1960's and 1970's, this theory is a conflict-based theory and it believe that the difference and injustice between man and woman is societal not biological especially in the terms of power, right of decision-making, freedom and societal roles. This theory highlights that society suppress women based on gender and women are deprived of equal rights (Olivia, 2023). Resilience theory was presented by many researchers such as Norman Garmezy and Emmy Werner etc in 1970, this theory shows, despite difficult situations, how people regains control and move forward in their lives, learns and grow stronger for example, bounce back from adversity (Roberta et al., 2004). Coping theory was developed by Lazarus and Folkman in 1984, according to this theory when people face stress, mental or emotional pressure and difficulties, to cope from that situation at that time people may cope differently.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study has used a qualitative research approach for conducting this research, using semi-structured interview guide. In-depth interviews have conducted with the participants to gather insights about their post-divorce experiences. The non-probability sampling technique, under which, snowball sampling techniques have been used to approach and access the specific target audiences for participants in the research. The data was collected by using semi-structured interviews guideline with the participants. The study has taken place in person interviews and each interview lasted approximately 35 minutes. The guide has included open ended questions which allow the participants to share their perceptions in their own terms. The data have recorded digitally using a recorder. The study has focused on divorced mothers who are living alone and those who are living with their family (such as father, brother etc.) and those who did second marriage after divorce within Rawalpindi. The interviews were conducted with the ten participants for this study. The participants were selected from different areas in Rawalpindi such as Dhok Mangtal, Chakri Road and Adiyala Road. The researcher used thematic analysis to analyze the findings from the participant's interviews. In the study interviews were first conducted in the Urdu, then researcher transcribed the data into English language and later on six themes and twelve sub-themes were generated from the transcribed data. Informed consent and confidentiality were the main priority through research.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Life Experiences and Emotional Journey before and after Divorce:**

This theme delves into looking at how were the participant's life experiences prior to divorce; as a result it showed mixed experiences, some participants said that starting years of their marriage was very good, they had spent great time with each other while other participants said that from the initial stage of their marriage they had been experiencing very difficult in marriage. The study delves into different reasons for divorce. According to the majority of participants main reason for the divorce was interference if in-laws, especially mother-in-law, she creates too much misunderstanding and conflicts between couples due to several reasons such as different cultural practices, relying on mother-in-law for financial expenses/needs of her children and herself because husband had no financial career and giving birth to a baby girl due to which mother-in-law started mistreating her, and taunting her that it was her fault to give birth to a daughter and also she started accusing her of various things and put false allegations that she had an affair with other man which made family environment more toxic and due to his mother's pressure husband gave her divorce. Participant 7 said,

*“On the onset of my menstrual cycle my father arranged my marriage with a disabled person whom I spent 7 years after the death of my father my siblings intervened and ended my marriage because I was very young at that time I couldn't spend my whole life with an epilepsy and disabled person.”*

Participant 5 stated that,

*“I was Christian and my husband forced me into prostitution and when I refused he would beat me a lot. One day he came home in an intoxicated condition and forced me to go for prostitution and when I refused he beat me badly and in his anger he gave me divorce.”*

The current study consistent with the findings of (Ahmed & Riyaz, 2024) and (Hutasoit et al., 2024) where they revealed the reasons for divorce include, economic problems, domestic violence, early marriages, extra marital affairs, faithlessness and feeling of dominance.

Divorce leads to many psychological and mental health issues especially for women, that may involve feelings of being alone, depression, anxiety, social isolation and facing financial difficulties (Ali et al., 2016). The very difficult and very painful phase of a women life was her time of divorce, women goes through with severe type of trauma at that time similarly, in the current study women had gone through very hardest feelings for various reasons. The statements by the participants revealed that single mothers often face social stigma in the society and also they have a fear how they will raise their children alone in this society, because of cultural norms that alone woman cannot survive in this society without man and also in our society divorce is considered taboo where if woman got divorced then her and her parents reputation would be damaged, which lead to mental trauma and anxiety. The remaining of the participants explained, they had regret at that time, why they had wasted so many years with that person who used to beats them abuse them even though they were the one who earned for the children and household expenses but still her efforts were not valued, they should have left them earlier. Similarly, another participant was worried for her daughter's future and she said when her daughter grows up and she will got married what her in-laws will think was the reason for my divorce because in our society

the woman who got divorced was not considered good woman and everyone thinks it must be her fault that's why she got divorced.

Participants shared the moments where they felt totally broken and wanted to give up because of their families, children, dual responsibilities and loneliness. The responses from the participants show that in the difficult phase of their life they didn't get their family support which makes them feel more loneliness. In these cases families should be there to support their daughters but without their support they feel isolated which increases their emotional pain but somehow, they were able to manage their difficult time with the help of their neighbors and children and these supports help them to carry on their life and stay strong. My findings also support this idea that emotional supports from others are associated with better psychological well-being of divorced mothers (Zaleska & Basista, 2016). Meanwhile, in one case family becomes the strength and helps their daughter financially and emotionally. While some participants stayed strong in their difficult time and they were fully confident that it was not their mistake and no one can blame them for divorce. They said their husband and mother-in-law were toxic, it was not their fault. Participant 8 said,

*"I was not at fault so I didn't try to give up."*

Participant 2 said the same thing but with more clarity, she said,

*"When there is no mistake on your part you don't need to give up, so I didn't feel like giving up because it was not on mistake."*

These two statements from the respondent's show that it was not their fault and they don't blame themselves for divorce this helps them to avoid guilt and shame and they are more likely to move forward and recover emotionally (Kim, Jeon & Song, 2023). The study also delves into how women feel different about themselves after the divorce. Their way of thinking about their thoughts, self-confidence and identity has changed; some participants feel that they are now more stronger than before divorce while some may feel they are more weak and failed. The responses show that the divorce doesn't only give emotional pain but also has changed the practical life of mothers. Now they are single mothers and they are the one who has to fulfill the domestic, financial and children responsibilities, which has made their life more difficult. This part of my findings also matches to what some researchers found such as (Ajaz & Tabassum 2022), revealed in their study that divorce increased the economic vulnerability of women such as managing financial burdens alone which cause mental health issues.

While some women entered into the second marriage due to some personal and family reasons. Their experiences were quite different and in their second marriage they were very satisfied with their lives and more happy compared to their first marriage. Participant 4 said,

*"In the previous marriage I was in a toxic relationship but in new marriage I'm living a happy and respectful life and my husband and children wouldn't let anyone say a bad word about me and now I feel more secure and safe."*

One participant said, when you live with your family and husband everyone respects you but after divorce everyone sees you with suspicion and treats you in a way like I'm the one to blame. However, other participants said in their married life they were extremely fragile, stressed,

lacked confidence, their life were totally controlled by their husbands and in laws but now after divorce they have made their selves much stronger and without any fear they are living their life freely and confidently in this society. Participant 7 stated that,

*“Before divorce our family environment was very abusive and I used to be very depressed all the time but after divorce at least I’m having a peaceful environment where can live according to myself and doesn't have to tolerate abusive language and violence.”*

This shows that after divorce women feel themselves as strong, free and empowered. Sometimes, divorce is not just a negative experience it is a first step towards psychological peace and personal freedom. These women not only rejects the cruelty but also rediscovered themselves. Which also highlights when woman receive support and have believe in her then she can find new paths and can improve her life (Razaq, Zulfiqar & Gul, 2024).

This study also explores what does mean to be being strong according to the participants. Every participant has faced bitter truths of life. For some, being strong means not just hiding pain but also facing pain and never give up always moves forward. However, majority of the participants said same things in a different ways they said, a woman is strong when she is self-independent especially financially and emotionally, for them the real strength is doing everything on their will power, being with her children and supported by them emotionally and financially, and last but not least having a strong connect, faith and belief in Allah Almighty. These statements from the participants mentions, being strong is not just about enduring pain but also about taking charge of life by believing yourself. These woman shows, if they have their children by their side, have strong faith on Allah Almighty then they can face every challenge, insult and pain (Razaq, Zulfiqar & Gul, 2024).

### **Coping Mechanism and Financial Independence after Divorce**

After divorce women not only have to face emotional trauma, but also they have to handle the biggest challenge which is managing financial conditions, especially for those women who were totally financially dependent on their husbands before divorce. Now, they have to support themselves and their children all alone which is in many cases linked with low education, unemployment and societal pressure. When a woman goes through with a trauma like divorce, at that time she breaks down not only socially or economically but also mentally and emotionally at such time she adopt some habits and coping strategies which help her to manages herself and gradually she started to rebuild her life. This theme explored what kind of coping strategies women have used to make their elves strong and how they tried to become financially independent.

The statements from the participants shows that women have managed their selves from different sources; religion gave spiritual peace, education gave confidence and courage to move forward, skill learning gave engagement and purpose and a small help from neighbors did not let them feel alone. These coping strategies were not just temporary solutions but also became a source of resilience and healing.

However, over the time some women found coping strategies but there are some respondents who are still suffering from severe mental stress, depression and trauma, for them the impact of divorce rather than waning over time, sometimes deepens. As respondent 6 said,

*“I’m still struggling and I’m unable to cope after suffering from this entire trauma.”*

Respondent 1 said,

*“As I said I’m still struggling I haven’t coped fully.”*

This shows that for some women coping strategies were not available, like no education, no support system and no financial independence as a result they are still suffering from loneliness, emotional trauma and anxiety. The condition of these respondents shows that coping is not just about time, it is about availability of support, opportunities, internal and external resources, when these things are not available then woman remains stuck in the same trauma from long time. The participant 10, told me that she coped from the toughest time all alone with the help of her children and participant 7 said, her boss where she work helped her to come out from difficult time and motivate her to become strong. Among the entire 10 participant there was only one case where woman got support from their family.

This theme also underscores what activities women do to heal themselves. Some participants said, after divorce till now they have not fully recovered from emotional trauma, healing and feeling better is an ongoing struggle for them. However other participants told that, they do different things to make themselves heal from the stress. Participant 4 said,

*“I used to eat clay.”*

According to her, this practice temporarily calms her down and she forgets her tensions and burdens for a while.

Participants 6 stated,

*“At the time of stress I used to smoke all the time day and night and lived alone.”*

These behaviors shows that when emotional pain becomes unbearable and you don’t have proper support and help then sometimes, women adopt such methods which gave them temporarily relief but break them from inside.

However, rest of the participants said, some used to cry and share their feelings and pain with others which gave them temporarily relieve while other said they get involved into activities which make them busy such as giving home tuition and do wazifa’s which divert their mind and help them to avoid stress .

According to this theme, the journey of coping was not same for every woman. Some women move towards healing, some remain stuck and there are still some who used dangerous methods to reduce their pain, which shows a reflection if lack of support and emotional pain. These coping methods from the participants can be understood by the theory provided by (Lazarus, Folkman 1984 and Folkman 2008). According to them some women did the things which helped them to find right solutions of their problems such as getting education, learning skills and finding jobs, this method is known as problem-focused coping. Some women adopted those methods through which they can reduce their emotional pain such as reading Quran, to make Dua to Allah or spending time with children and manage themselves. Even one woman said she used to eat clay

and another said she used to smoke to forget tensions temporarily. These are known as emotion-focused coping. Through all this we can understand that every woman tries to come out from their situations, thoughts, pain and problems differently.

This theme also explores, how second marriage helped divorced women to cope from the difficult. For some women after divorce, second marriage is not just about a social bond but also it becomes a mean of emotional healing and their second marriage has become a source of coping mechanism, which pull them back towards life. One participant said in second marriage she received the respect, love and support that they didn't have in their first marriage. These stories from respondent's highlights that sometimes, love, protection and new beginning can restore a woman's broken world. Second marriage not just became a relationship but also return to comfort, protection and new identity for them and this relationship has restored self-esteem, confidence and emotional stability within them.

This shows coping strategies is not just about internal healing, sometimes, a presence of a good person or partner can become of source of healing in life. In society second marriage is often seen negatively but experience from these participants tell us if relationship is healthy, then it can bring spring to the woman's life. However, for some women second marriage has become a source of improvement in their life but experiences of some other respondents were very different, for them second marriage not only failed to heal the wound of first marriage but also it cause new traumas, violence, abandonment and pressure and it became a physically, mentally and emotionally double burden for them. The statements from the participants shows that, sometimes, for finding a secure place for themselves and their children women get remarried and their experiences shows us that second marriage as a coping strategies doesn't work equally for everyone. When second marriage also become a cause of violence, double burden and repeated trauma and the person instead of giving you protection leave you, then woman totally lost her confidence, identity, protection and purpose. These cases also shows the failure of this society where, women don't get any protection system, support networks and shelters and when family, government and society don't help, then these women sometimes, are forced to take unwanted and unsafe paths they had once escaped from. The findings of my study support the idea of existing literatures such as (Sothy Eng et al., 2020), according to their one of the research, during the second marriage many women have to face domestic violence and emotional pressure, especially if they are financially and socially weak, it means sometimes, second marriage can also become a trauma and exploitation.

After divorce women have to struggle different aspects of life at a time. The struggle is not only about the end of relationship, but also it's about the facing financial issues, emotional trauma and Social isolation. This theme delves into how women have regained financial independence, take charge of them emotionally and lead themselves back to the life through spiritual and emotional support. After divorce the biggest challenge for women is to manage financial expenses. Among all, four of the participants said they earn themselves and take care of financial expenses all alone without anyone's help. The responses revealed that many women have to bear the immediate financial burden, for which they had to work as a house maid. They used to clean,

washing dishes and do other household chores in two to three homes to cover the financial and children expenses and still they are doing this. Only one respondent was educated and she used to work as a teacher and also did stitching to manage expenses. She said education not only gives them autonomy but also it returned self-confidence. This shows education, skills and social situations effect the women financial decisions directly.

Every woman has chosen the way according to her ability, which was possible for her at the time. However two participants said before second marriage one used to work as a house keeper in two to three houses at a time and there was a NGOs, the "Khawateen Interest" helped me a lot. Now my husband is taking care of all expenses (p3). One participant was dependent on her family and she said she don't worry about anything because my father help me financially and I am also living with them. Another participant was also dependent on her family. Her mother used to help her financially but after her death, now she is totally alone she has only one daughter who is married but doesn't help her mother she is living all alone in a single room in jungle type area. The presence of family support promotes peace of mind, independence and confidence, however, the absence of family support not only cause financial difficulties but also leads to the state of deep loneliness and helplessness.

Two participants have spent very difficult life at starting one used to sell fritters and another used to run canteen at schools along with that they also have worked as house maid at multiple homes but now they are having a good life, one is getting pension of her father and other's children have grown up and they are earning. These two mothers are now financially independent. These two examples shows that post-divorce struggles are not always permanent and a small help from efforts, patience and family can give strength to women to start a new life. This also reveals that when a woman finds stability in their life, they not only live a better life but also regain their self-confidence.

After divorce therapy and professional counseling can be an important support for those women who are facing emotional and psychological pressure, but this study shows that most of the women did not have any access to such facility. Majority of the participant said they didn't receive any kind of professional counseling and therapy and they also mentioned they definitely felt the need for it but either this facility was not available around them or there was no awareness about it. There was only one participant who got professional support but on a limited level. That help was just not like a proper professional support in fact, it was more like a friendly or moral support. Participant 7 said,

*"My boss where I work is a psychiatrist, whenever I get upset I share my feelings and pain with her she consoled me and motivate me to become strong."*

From this observation, it can be concluded that in the societies like Pakistan, divorce women do not have any access to professional psychological support. Not only a limited support but also they don't have any awareness about this facility. Due to this weakness most of the women have to rely on self-hope or informal social support, these they of situations lead to mental health inequality especially, for divorce women for whom the therapy and psychological help becomes luxury.

After divorce, for most of the participants the biggest support was their strong believe on religion and Allah Almighty. They said when everyone left them. They were all alone, very stressed and worried, at that time they prayed to Allah, did wazifa's, read Quran by doing this they found inner and mental peace, their connection with Allah became strong and this connection encouraged them to stand up for their children. The response from the participants shows that, the religion and their strong connection with Allah helped them to cope emotionally. When they were totally alone and had no support at that time their strong believe on Allah give them strength, their faith, prayers and spiritual peace has become special support for them. This shows that in our society spiritual support is also an important coping strategy.

After divorce the very important question for divorce mothers was to whom should they trust, who will help them? Most of the participants got help from their family and neighbors and only participant got help from social-welfare institution, which help them to become strong. However in most of the cases support was not financial but moral. In most of the cases family support the woman emotionally and their support played a big role in forgetting what had happened to them and now they should move on. Some participants said they get emotional support from their neighbors and financial support from the boss where they used to work. Among all of 10 participants, only one got help from social welfare center. Meanwhile, three participants said they didn't receive any type of help from others. They have managed all the things alone. These responses from participants show that after divorce the biggest need for them was someone's support and help. Some women got emotional and financial help from their family, neighbors and boss where they used to work, which help them to take charge if their life and start a new life. One got convinced from the family for second marriage through which her life got better. Some got support from where they work and one got support from NGO. All these supports become hope for them which saved them from breaking. But there were some women who did not received any kind of support, because of which they are still alone, stressed and are in financial difficulties. This shows that support system play an important role in woman's beginning of new life and healing.

### **Social and Cultural Pressure after Divorce**

After divorce woman not only face financial and emotional challenges, but they also have to face judgment, stigma and cultural pressure from society. This theme underscores that most of the time divorce women were underestimated because of they are now separate from their husband and not living with them. Society doubts them and points finger on their character and mostly left them alone. If they become self-sufficient but still they face criticism and sometimes, the family started blaming the woman for everything, even though they already knew that it was not her fault. All these things have a strong impact on their mental health and life. Some participants told that people used to blame them for everything such as divorce, child upbringing and not marrying again. Due to this pressure some women made some changes in their lives. Two participants said they helped themselves, one by confronting and other by staying quiet but both didn't let the criticism from society their weakness. While some respondent said there family stood with them at that time, so they didn't give much importance their words. For these women family support was a shield

because of which they handled the societal pressure. This shows that family help not only give emotional support but also it helps to handle the societal pressure. In such cases women have ignored the societal judgments and focused on their lives. But in some cases, women had to face criticism from their own family. Participant 5 mentioned,

*“From society I didn’t face much things but my family threatened me and said they will kill me because after divorce I married a Muslim guy, so I left that area.”*

These cases shows that in one side if family support can becomes a strength of woman on the other side family oppression and coercion can also leave woman isolated which made her life more difficult. However, some participants told that they didn’t faced any stigma or judgment from society because people already knew the situation through which I’m surviving. Participant 8 said, *“People already knew the situations of how I was struggling with that person so they supported me.”*

For these women society showed sympathy and support, even they motivate them so they can move forward. This shows when society understands the difficulties of women then instead of blaming them, it encourages their strength and this help woman to rebuild their life.

All the experiences defined in this theme consistent with the research of previous literature such as (zafeer et al., 2022) and (Khalid, Saleem & Ghani, 2023), in their study they showed that societal judgment and family pressure made woman life more difficult. However, the study by (Zaleska & Basista, 2016) revealed that if society helps the woman then she can find better solutions to come out from their difficulties. This proves that social behaviors can either make women mental and practical life better or could get worse; all depends on how society treats them.

### **Children as Strength or Weaknesses**

Divorce changed the role of mothers. This theme explored that for most of the participants their children did not become burden to them in fact, they are the strength and reason to live. They become emotionally strong because of their children. But one respondent said, she sacrificed her life for her daughter but instead of becoming her strength she gave her more traumas and make her life even more worsen. After divorce, for single mothers her children are the one for whom they sacrifice rest of their lives, their children becomes their strength, but the response of the participant shows that sometimes, your children becomes the biggest regret of your life. However, in other cases children becomes the biggest strength of their mothers. The participants also said for their children they make themselves strong and their role of mother becomes motivation for them and their children provide them sense of emotional security which brings stability to their lives.

This theme also looks at how the role of mother changed. Some respondent told that after playing a role of mother becomes a new challenge for women. These women not only suffer from emotional trauma but also they took charge of upbringing of their children along with handling the responsibilities of household expenses and their studies alone, and responsibilities have doubled or even tripled. All this was very tiring and hectic. By the time life of these women started getting better. These struggles have made the role of mother even stronger. However, some participants told that divorce has profound impact on role of mother. The statements show that after divorce the role of mother not only gets doubled but also become very difficult, where woman have to play

the role of mother as well as the role of father and have to become socially and emotionally strong. On the other side, some participants told that divorce didn't affect their role of mother. Participant 7 said,

*“Divorce didn't affect my role, before the divorce I was the one who used to take care of my children and earn for family and after the divorce I'm doing the same thing.”*

Similarly participant 3 mentioned,

*“My divorce doesn't affect my role as a mother because my second husband took the responsibility of my children, but yes it helped me to become more self-confident about myself.”*

These statements show that the experience of divorce is not same for every woman, for some it is a chance for new beginning where they find support, happiness and mental peace. Furthermore, some participants feel the role of mother as strong and responsible after divorce.

According to the participants their children become their strength and support after divorce, for their children women manages themselves emotionally and became financially self-independent. (Khalid et al., 2023) confirms this and their study revealed that the presence of children, support the women in the difficult stages of their lives and they endurance this challenge because of their children. Similarly, according to (Mkumbwa,2023), single mothers despite the pressure of their children studies and daily expenses they still didn't give up and perform their role more responsibly. (Matsai, 2019), also concluded that, women reordered their decisions of life for their children, whether they are financially weak. But some mothers also told that if children are rude and show disrespect then they also become the reason of mental stress for them. Meanwhile, (Zafeer, Maqbool & Yanping, 2022), also confirms this in their study that, when women already facing too much pressure and children do not support her and misbehave then relationship between mother and children can be worsen.

### **Self-Discovery and Empowerment after Divorce**

When a woman goes through with a biggest trauma of her life such as divorce, then she not only face relationship but also herself, this is the time of beginning of her journey of personal growth and search for identity, where woman learn how much strong she is and what is want to do important in her life. This theme explores what women have learnt about them after divorce. The biggest change has been seen in the woman life after divorce. Through the responses of participants we can understand that, divorce is not only just the journey of sadness but it's also about discovering your real strength and becoming empowered. The statements from the participants show that sometimes sacrifice her life completely but at the end she gets nothing even from her own children. While the other statement shows that women made education her strength and learnt social changes, now through her education ability she is self-empowered.

After divorce some participants learnt new things about their life. Participant 4 told that, in her second marriage, she is living a happy life and she is also self-confident but, apparently she looks strong but she still has past pain in her heart, which didn't let her feel strong. While participant 6 told that, your real support is your parents, even if husband hurts you or mistreats you, your parents are the one who will stand behind you like a rock and question that injustice but if we cut ties with our family we lost our moral and social support which makes your life more

painful. So in your life no matter what the situation is never leave your parents. While the two contradictory statements from the participants show that after divorce every woman looks at herself differently. First statement shows the societal pressure, where a woman is considered a complete person only when she is connected with man. On the other side, second participant challenged this thought and finds herself strong and self-independent woman. These two statements make us understand that the journey of empowerment is different for every woman.

After divorce women have seen an increase self-confidence, self-awareness and inner strength which is also mentioned in the existing studies such as (Khalid et al., 2023), in their study, the divorced women from Sialkot told that, by making decisions of life has increased self-confidence among them. Many women told that before divorce they were rely on others but now they are financially self-independent and emotionally strong. According to (Zafeer et al., 2022), after divorce in search of their identity when women got chances, they use their education and experiences not only to make their place in the society but also discovering a new self. Some woman told that now they can make difference between right and wrong, they can take stand for themselves and they considered come out from abusive relationship as their strength. This process becomes a cause of their self-confidence.

The life after divorce not only depends on struggle but also for many women it is a chance to recognize themselves, appreciates their efforts and feels proud about their strength. In this sub-theme, there are many participants, who shared their moments where they felt proud about themselves, whether that moment is about raise children successfully, completion of children study or being financial self-independent., these were the proud moment for them, which make them feel that even though they are alone, they can do anything. The moments show that after divorce they can live their life with pride and dignity. However, one participant felt proud when she got pension of her father while some felt proud because she sent her son abroad to support them financially. One participant considered best upbringing of her daughter as her biggest achievement, while some felt peace by built a house from her own money. One participant told that although she has not felt anything special but still, she feels strong about herself because everyone is living with their families but at this age she is living alone in the jungle type area. These moments are the proof that, divorce women not only handle the difficulties but also they are strong enough to make their and their children life better with efforts and proud.

### **Future Outlook and Advice**

This theme explored who women see the future and what are their expectation to the future. Many of the participants have simple and peaceful dreams for future. Their biggest wish is their children spend happy life, do great job and after marriage live a great life. Some statements show that after worldly difficulties now she is in search of spiritual peace. These hope shows that now women don't want anything for themselves they just want to live for the betterment of their children, respect and peace. While some statements show pain and experience hidden in her heart. After experiencing different type of difficulties and behaviors in her life, now she doesn't want their children to become the same like their father. This show, women hope to covert her difficulty into a lesson for the betterment of next generation. This is not just love of mother but also a hope of

better society. However, the hopes of some women are according to their situations. Some participants hope for economic improvement such building a portion of home for rent, to improve the future of their children. While one participant emotionally hopes to reconcile with her second husband and another participant want their son from jail come back and on participant after experiencing difficult life now, she doesn't have any hope for future. These emotions shows that after divorce every woman live her life according to her own and hope for better hope it could be in terms of economic, emotional and spiritual.

The life after divorce is a big challenge, not only for the mother, but also for her children and surrounding social circles. The experiences of women who are struggling from these situations, not only show their personal courage and strength, but also it includes some insights which can provide guidance to other divorce women who are facing the same challenges. This theme also explored what suggestions they give to other divorce mothers who are suffering from the same situations. The majority of the participant's advised to other divorced mothers was about self-reliant, courage, and persistence. From their life experiences, they have learned that, it is important to stand strong in an environment of societal pressure, criticism, and distrust. They repeatedly emphasized on one important aspect, which was about financial independence. Participants advised that women should try to earn on their own so they don't have to rely on anyone, especially on the men. Similarly, some participants advised for spiritual stability that, make your connections strong with God instead of people, because he is the best helper. Another important aspect was importance of children. Participants advised other mothers that, the real success is your children's good upbringing because they are the one who will become your strength in future. They also said, only if mother is strong then the children will be successful in life. These advices are the practical and encouraging messages for other women who are also going through this journey. The statements from the participants show that the advices of divorced mother are not only practical, but also it is related to the bitter experiences of life. Every woman has different experience and point of view, and their advices are built on that. But the overall advice is, women should have to take the decisions of their life on their own, and whatever decisions they take, it should be with confidence and wisdom.

## **CONCLUSION**

The current study is based on the lives of those divorced mothers who not only bear the difficult phase of their life, but also emerge from it and started a new journey. Their responses showed that after divorce, not only sadness and loneliness, but new chances, personal growth and self-identification is also possible in life, if they follow the resilience and coping strategies. The research showed that women have used different coping strategies to manage themselves. These coping strategies are religious affiliations such as reading Quran, pray; wazifa's and having faith on Allah, took practical steps such as self-sufficiency, second marriage, rearing children, learned skills, also utilized their education for earning and job mostly as a housemaids, societal support such as support from family, welfare and neighbors and lastly they cope through emotional support such as crying, sharing their sorrow with others. Many women have noticed positive changes about themselves such as increased self-confidence, the feeling that they don't need a man's identity, and strength of decision-making.

While some learned that if you have family support, then you can easily bear the pain, the sorrow, and difficulties, because you know that your family is with you. And those women who didn't get any help from anyone, their only hope were their faith on Allah. All this shows the facts of resilience theory that in a difficult situation a person can find strength from different sources, so, the women have used problem-focused and emotion-focused copying strategy differently. All findings of this study is compatible with the resilience theory, empowerment theory, social role theory, feminist theory and coping theory which confirms that women can strongly take care of themselves if they get emotional, spiritual and social support. The overall message of this study is after divorce the journey of life doesn't end but woman can rebuild her life if she gets proper resources, support and have self-confidence.

## **LIMITATIONS**

Some of the limitations of this study included that the sample size was very limited which was linked with women from a specific area or town and therefore the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the rest of the Pakistani population or all divorced women. The second drawback is time and resources were very limited for this study due to which the researcher was not able to explore more places. The study was only based on interviews so it was not possible to observe their resilience in practical life.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Recommendations of this thesis are although there are many programs and initiatives which help the divorced mothers but still most women don't know about this. For resolving this issue the government should run the awareness campaigns about the divorced mothers rights and facilities also the government should give basic education and training to divorce mothers through which they can make their own career and raise their children well. The very important point is that the

government should need to provide free counseling or therapy to divorced mothers so they can manage their emotional and mental health. There should be support groups for divorced mothers where they can share their experiences and receive guidance and support. Lastly the government should launch initiatives such as housing schemes, healthcare facilities and Opportunities only for divorced mothers. Apart from this, implementation and awareness is very important. The government and social welfare centers should run the awareness campaigns in every rural as well as in urban areas about the initiatives taken for divorced mothers.

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## Resilience and coping strategies of divorced mothers in Pakistan

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