



RESEARCH PAPER

The Final Straw: Unveiling the Causes of Women-Initiated Divorce in Lahore, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Women-Initiating Divorce in Pakistan is socially stigmatized and inadequately examined in mainstream discourse. The understudy phenomenon is increasing and profoundly changing the dynamics of the family system. This qualitative study explores and investigates the compelling reasons why Pakistani women chose legal divorce (Khula), ignoring the attached stigma as a last resort when no other option works and reconciliation becomes untenable. Deploying the qualitative research design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with 15 divorce-initiator women in urban Lahore, using purposive sampling. The data were collected in accordance with all ethical considerations. The data have been transcribed, coded, and categorized. The emerging themes and findings of the study highlighted that chronic emotional neglect, contagious violence, rigid gender hierarchies, lack of spousal accountability, in-laws' interference, and mismatched marriages are the most dominating reasons for filing for divorce by urban Pakistani women. Pre-marital counselling, establishing accessible support networks for resolving conflicts between couples, are essential for strengthening the marriage and family institute.

KEYWORDS Divorce, Khula, Divorce-Initiator Women, Violence, Stigma

Introduction

Every marriage is unique and brings hope, commitment, belonging, and positive expectations (Lawrence et al., 2021; Fahd & Hanif, 2019; Muzaffar, et. al, 2018) for both spouses, whereas a series or combination of undesired factors can push either partner towards withdrawal from this legal relationship of marriage, and they choose divorce as the solution. The increased divorce rate indicates that an unstable family institution is threatening the future of prosperous societies. Recent years show the increasing ratio of women-initiated divorce even in countries like Pakistan (Rashid, 2024; Arshad et al., 2024). Divorce initiated by women in Pakistan is a multifaceted and complex social phenomenon interrelated with many social, cultural, financial, personal, and familial factors. Pakistan has successfully integrated the unilateral right of Khula for women into its legal framework, a process facilitated by judicial evolution and ultimately endorsed by religious experts, resulting in a robust system (Ali et al., 2022; Abbasi, 2022).

Despite a patriarchal origin, the woman-initiated divorce rate in Pakistan is increasing (Zafeer, 2022), as is the case in other Asian countries like Iran and India (Sheykhi, 2020). It depicts the changes in the social fabric, struggles in the marriage institution, and the denial of women from staying in oppressive, abusive, and violent marriages. Despite its cost, women are more likely to initiate divorce (Oldham, 2021;

Parker et al., 2022; Wafa, Ahmed & Saleem, 2023). Divorce rates are high due to the economic empowerment of women and cultural norms (Sheykhi, 2020; Ikram & Usman, 2022; Tahira et al., 2023; Muhammad et al., 2024). The present study aims to investigate the significant and distinctive reasons that compel women to take a step towards ending their relationship through legal divorce. In patriarchal societies, women are culturally and socially bound to prove themselves good wives in all stages of life after marriage. A divorced woman is considered socially deviant, a failure, and a bad woman in Pakistani society. Regardless of age, a divorced woman is always regarded as vulnerable. However, some intersectional factors, like the initiation of divorce by woman, make her a deviant culturally and socially. Contextually, this study intends to understand the final straw and the ultimate reason why women initiate breaking the legal and emotional contract of marriage. Women can't give divorce orally; they need to step out of the boundary wall of their house and involve legal structure and considerations for it. This study forefronts those unbearable circumstances when a woman finds no other option than divorce, and she practically goes into the legal arena. Understanding woman-initiated divorce and its reasons in Pakistani society is important to explore for making interventions, seeking solutions, and policy-making.

Literature Review

Divorce has been in the spotlight in national and international discourse for years. However, it has become a significant field of research in recent years because of the increasing divorce rate and its worst outcomes in the lives of many, particularly in collectivist, patriarchal, and developing countries. Divorce, despite its complex, unhappy, and grieving consequences in the lives of those affected, is increasing alarmingly around the globe, indicating social and institutional disharmony and instability (Sheykhi, 2020). Divorce, a legal dissolution of marriage, is the outcome of many entrenched negative, unfavorable, and unwanted circumstances in the marital life of an individual. Consequently, it brings harm, pain, gloom, grief, uncertainty, and many other evils in the life of the affected. In recent years, the issue of women initiating divorce in Pakistan has received increased academic and societal attention. Historically, Pakistani society has been profoundly patriarchal, with marriage often regarded as a lifelong and sacred tie shaped by cultural, religious, and familial obligations. However, changing social dynamics, legal understanding, and women's empowerment have all contributed to a distinctive shift in marriage patterns and dynamics, specifically in urban areas (Ali & Bibi, 2016).

Pakistani Women may get a divorce through two channels Talaq (Divorce initiated by men) and Khula (A Judicial Divorce initiated by women). Although Khula is legitimate and allowed but less encouraged and accepted in previous years because of the stigma and social pressure attached to it. Recent studies, however, show a gradual increase in women exercising this right, often citing reasons such as domestic violence, emotional neglect, infidelity, forced marriages, and lack of compatibility (Khan & Mahmood, 2020). Many developing countries, particularly in the Asian region, are experiencing marital dissolutions because of increased social and economic changes, including the acceptance of divorce, educational and economic empowerment of women, violence, third-party interference, financial crisis, and emotional challenges like extramarital affairs, detachment between couples and shift in gender roles (Ziaee et al., 2014; Ibrar, 2017; Mohlatlole, 2018; Naab et al., 2019; Rizwan, 2021; Akter, 2012; Coşkun, 2020; Mahmood, 2016; Sultana, 2021). Yigit and Kurnaz (2024) discussed how social, economic, and psychological factors play an important role in the decision-making process of divorce by women, particularly in the acceptance of divorce. The women's

right to divorce is striking and causing an incline in divorce rate in urban areas of Pakistan (Abbasi, 2017, 2022).

Sanchez& Mota (2023) undertook a study to investigate the association between marital satisfaction, gender roles, and perceived partner violence. They discovered that women experiencing marital discontent frequently felt psychological abuse and humiliation from their partners, resulting in low self-esteem and a desire for subservient gender roles. Such relationships can create a toxic atmosphere, compelling women to seek divorce as a means of reclaiming their autonomy and well-being. Waseem et al. (2020) discussed the main reasons for divorce in Punjab, and the dominant reasons are domestic abuse and the emotional consequences of this abuse. The novelty of this research lies in understanding the challenges of marital life and breakups through the lens of women as initiators of divorce.

In all other cases, domestic violence is a significant factor in cases filed by women for taking divorce. According to a report by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (2022), a large proportion of women who seek khula report prolonged physical and emotional abuse. On the other side, financial and educational independence, attainment, and economic empowerment made women strong enough to challenge oppressive marital conditions. Urbanization and exposure to global discourses on women's rights have further emboldened women to assert autonomy over their personal lives (Zafar & Imran, 2018; Rehman & Qureshi, 2019). Legal reforms and increased media coverage of women's issues have also contributed significantly to the acceptance of divorce initiated by women. However, many women continue to confront significant societal stigma, familial pressure, and procedural barriers within the judicial system. Despite serious marital pain, many people continue to avoid divorce due to the social ramifications, which include loss of custody, financial uncertainty, or communal rejection.

The literature highlights the multiplex aspects of personal agency, institutions, legal structures and socio-cultural issues. Despite the increased divorce rate initiated by women, there are profound societal and legal challenges and disparities which make the circumstances tougher when a woman initiates divorce.

Material and Methods

The current study aims to explore the context that encouraged women to initiate divorce in a patriarchal society like Pakistan, despite the attached stigma associated with divorce. The ontological stance of the study intends to explore the experiences of women who initiated divorce. The reality is subjective and requires the active participation of the researcher. Therefore, the epistemological stance of the study is interpretive. The study adopted a qualitative research design. The population of the study was the women of Lahore who initiated divorce, thus, legal process initiators. For seeking Khula, that is the divorce initiated by women, men's consent is not required. As per the West Pakistan Family Courts Act, 1964, and the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961, women can initiate divorce by filing a suit in the Family Courts. The judge sent notice to the husband and, within the first two hearings, initiated the reconciliation process among spouses. In case of failure of the reconciliation process, the court proceed with the Khula (women initiated divorce) hearing. If women remain unwilling to continue the marriage and the court also gets in favor of the women, the court issues a decree for dissolution of marriage through Khula. The woman returns the Haq Mehr (financial obligation or marital gift by the husband to the wife as per Islamic Shariah). Afterwards, the court sends the decree

for dissolution of marriage to the Union Council, and after 90 days, the Union Council issues a formal divorce certificate to the relevant parties.

Therefore, to fulfil the research needs, the study employed two-stage sampling. At level one, union councils were selected, and at level two, women who initiated divorce were recruited from the selected union councils. 15 union councils of Lahore were selected using convenience sampling. The researchers opted for a purposive sampling technique, and the sample size of the study was 15 women who initiated divorce. One woman from each selected union council was recruited. The inclusion criterion of the study includes:

- The women of Lahore who initiated the divorce
- The divorced-initiated women who have received the formal divorce certificate not more than 6 months ago
- Working Women at the time of Divorce initiation
- Women with having at least one child

The exclusion criterion of the study includes:

- The women who are divorced but did not initiate the divorce
- The divorced-initiated women who have received the formal divorce certificate more than 6 months
- Divorce-Initiation Women without Kids
- Non-Working Divorce-Initiator Women

The chairman of the Union Council acted as the gatekeeper of the study. The researcher contacted the chairman of the selected Union Councils and shared the purpose of the research. The Chairman of the Union Council contacted the women who fulfilled the inclusion criterion of the study. After their consent, the Chairman shared the details of the participants. The schedule of the interview was later decided between the researcher and participants through mutual convenience. The data was collected using in interviews through a semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide was designed using deductive coding with the help of the literature. The rapport building and closure of the interview were the difficulties in the study. Participants were supposed to share their personal and intimate information, which may be traumatic for them to recall. Each interview lasted for nearly 60 minutes to 90 minutes. In 3 cases, the participants called off the interview in between and asked to schedule the interview for next week due to an emotional meltdown. The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis. After transcription, data familiarization was done. The codes were assigned, and categories were generated. Considering the categories, the themes were generated. Taking into account the sensitivity of the topic, all ethical measures were strictly followed. The anonymity of the respondents was maintained, and the confidentiality of the data was ensured. The well-being of the participants was prioritized. The participants were clearly briefed about the purpose of the research and their right to withdraw at any given time.

Results and Discussion

The current study delved into the experiences of women who initiated divorce and highlighted the most vivid and strong reasons for stepping towards breaking the marital knot and heading for a legal divorce. Marriage and the intricate nature of spousal

relations, when breaks are usually shrouded and blurred in expressions of the affected. The current study brought forth the pivotal reasons as “final straws”, highlighting and reflecting the faded and unacknowledged efforts of compromise, understanding, tolerance and acceptability of years.

Table 1
Socio-Demographic

| Participants | Age | Gender | Education | Occupation | Family Structure | Year of Marriage at the time of Divorce |
|--------------|-----|--------|--------------|------------------|------------------|---|
| P1 | 38 | F | M. Com | Banking | Joint | 6 |
| P2 | 32 | F | Graduation | Housewife | Joint | 5 |
| P3 | 33 | F | Masters | Office Job | Joint | 5 |
| P4 | 35 | F | M.Phil. | College Teacher | Joint | 7 |
| P5 | 33 | F | MBA | Cooperate Sector | Nuclear | 4 |
| P6 | 31 | F | Graduate | Health Sector | Joint | 5 |
| P7 | 28 | F | Intermediate | Self-Employed | Joint | 6 |
| P8 | 34 | F | Masters | School Teacher | Joint | 6 |
| P9 | 33 | F | Graduate | School Teacher | Joint | 5 |
| P10 | 28 | F | Graduate | Working at Salon | Joint | 4 |
| P11 | 29 | F | Masters | Banking | Nuclear | 5 |
| P12 | 34 | F | Masters | Housewife | Joint | 6 |
| P13 | 33 | F | Masters | College Teacher | Joint | 5 |
| P14 | 34 | F | M.Phil | Self-Employed | Nuclear | 5 |
| P15 | 32 | F | <u>B.Com</u> | Travel Firm | Joint | 6 |

The data of the current study have been collected from 15 divorced-initiator women in Lahore, with an age range between 28 and 34 years. One participant's educational level was intermediate, 5 were graduates, 7 were Master's, and 2 were M.Phil. Two of them was housewives, and others were working in education, health, and the banking sector, whereas two of the participants were self-employed. Three participants were in a nuclear family system, whereas 12 were in a joint family system. The years of marriage at the time of divorce ranged from (4 to 7) years. The participants of this research highlighted and shared the major reasons of the divorce which led them to the courts for breaking the marital knots, in spite of realising the battlefields of the coming years.

Marital Infidelity

Marital infidelity is betrayal, adultery, unfaithfulness and cheating with a legitimate partner by being emotionally and sexually involved with someone else. This is the most prominent reason for women-initiated divorce in Lahore, Pakistan. Rokach & Chan(2023) also described that infidelity is one of the leading reasons for divorce. In patriarchal societies, such unfaithfulness was more acceptable traditionally, but in contemporary days, women speak about it, question it, and in many cases don't give room for acceptance to this evil in their marriage, particularly when it becomes a habit. A 33-year-old respondent shared her experience with her husband.

I sometimes felt an indirect clue of my husband's unfaithfulness from his friends when I went in his social circles, but I did not bother thinking that he would not do it again, as his unfaithfulness is becoming a public opinion now. But he was a habitual in his lust and disloyalty. So, I thought neither to forgive him nor to stay in his life. (P5, 33)

In Pakistani society, the expectation from a woman is to accept the upheavals of marriage without any complaint because of existing patriarchal marital norms within the social institutions. But with the increasing education, exposure of women to education and finances and realisation of their rights, self-realisation, women's reaction towards a disloyal man has changed to some extent.

A divorced female said, My husband was very carefree in his relationships; he used to share some inappropriate stuff on his social media, neglecting that my and his family were also there. His frank and illegitimate relationships were so loud and obvious that I publicly felt humiliated and worthless. My head was possessed by his infidelity and I left his home feeling that I had become slapstick. After 7 months of separation, I pursued my khula against him. My mother-in-law wanted me to come back; she said to me that I would regret it, and people would say that I was wrong. A man can marry four women, but her son was just passing time with other girls. She said that he was ready to keep me in his house in his room, and it was not a big problem. Hum nay bhi ye sab saha ha (We have also tolerated all this stuff) (P7, 28).

One of the more unacceptable kinds of marital infidelity is a homosexual relationship, which is a reprehensible cause in a Muslim and traditional society and is considered forbidden culturally and religiously. A research participant shared with a grief that her husband was involved in same-sex sex and which was a shock for her. She shared:

I was even ready to be in a marriage if he had been in a relationship with a female, but to live with a homosexual man was a threat to my 7-year-old son. So, I did not give it a second thought and left him alone by taking my son with me (P3, 33).

Moreover, in Pakistani society, homosexuality is considered a curse and sin, so when a woman finds her partner in such an activity, she completely feels devastated and doesn't even disclose the reason to others easily. Marital infidelity is considered to be an outcome of dissatisfaction and an unattractive marriage. Although there might be some other reasons in the journey of betrayal but eventually a woman gives less space to constant unfaithfulness in urban areas. Some of the respondents shared that we have been facing and tolerating many domestic issues where we felt alone, ignored, uncared for, unrecognized, but an illegitimate relationship with the husband was not acceptable for them.

When Violence Becomes Contagious

One of the most eminent reasons for a marital dissolution or legal divorce is violence and abuse, including physical, emotional and economic (Rubab & Alam, 2022). The participants of this research highlighted some complex forms of violence. Marriage for some of them was a room of violence, which is contagious and spreads in the whole family unit, making it most suffocated and vulnerable. One of the respondents shared;

I felt I had to escape the fire burning my existence, otherwise everyone in the house would suffer, making their lives in hell. To stay in my marriage was not possible for me when my husband started to make my child a victim. I was feeling that my child would also be a victim of this violence and abuse in any way. (P6, 35)

Another woman shared, *"I had been in a torturous marriage because I was not brave enough to face the disgrace associated with divorce by society, but ultimately after bearing it up*

to 5 years, I found myself incapable of staying with my husband because my daughter was being emotionally traumatized."

Women usually opt the divorce as a final solution when they feel that the violence is becoming contagious and harmful for their children. Many women shared that the denial and acceptance of violence is blurred in the marital institution of Pakistani society. Although women's education and economic empowerment are associated with the divorce initiation by women, whereas some working women said that they have been on the journey of abuse and violence for years, but when it was spreading and heading towards their kids emotionally and physically, they decided to leave their marriages and spouses by taking Khula. A divorced initiator woman expressed her feelings as :

By nature, I am not demanding; that's why my marriage remained alive for 7 years; however, there were multiple abuses I have been through. But I lost my second child as a result of physical violence (in my 6th month of pregnancy), and then I did not look back, and it took me a minute to decide to divorce. At that moment, I realized my other 4-year-old girl will also be victimized in by that brutal man (P14, 36).

The violence is not limited to the spouses only; it is also an outcome of the husband's weakness when the other family members get directly involved in the violence.

I was physically tortured by my brother-in-law and mother-in-law in front of my husband and 5-year-old son, and they kicked me out of the house, but my husband did not utter a word. I was bleeding and on the road when my father and uncle arrived at the moment, and this cruelty led to the separation and divorce. (P2,33)

However, considering the woman's perspective, the violence is a structural outcome and ingrained in the social institution as a normative action of controlling and dealing with power dynamics in informal regimes.

My husband was a puppet in his mother's and twice-divorced sister's hands; they attached my name to almost every male person in the family and no one ever trusted me when I was being harassed by my BIL in the absence of my husband. My reaction led to collective violence by the whole family. And yes, my extended family did not allow me to stay there for a single moment (P8, 34).

Economic abuse is also a significant yet often overlooked reason why many women in Pakistan initiate divorce. This form of abuse involves controlling a woman's access to financial resources, denying her basic needs, or preventing her from earning an income. In many cases, husbands withhold money, forbid their wives from working, or exploit their earnings, leaving women financially dependent and powerless. Such conditions lead to long-term emotional and psychological distress.

Unmet Intimacy: Loosening and Breaking the Knot

While physical abuse and financial issues are often cited as causes of divorce, emotional neglect and unmet intimacy are increasingly recognized as powerful, yet less visible, reasons why women initiate divorce in Pakistan. The societal and familial pressures make women bound in dysfunctional, unloved and uncared marriages with chronic emotional neglect. Women shared that they were in the environment where they felt themselves unloved, uncared for, alone, dissatisfied, disregarded of their contributions and emotionally neglected, which is killing the marital bond and after

years of experiencing these emotions the marriage doesn't work because the spouses are already separated. *"He was never there – not physically, not emotionally. I was married, but I felt more alone than when I was single. After five years of waiting for him to see me, I realized I had disappeared in my own life."* Tying the marital knot is a moment of expectations, belongingness, love, care, recognition and respect in contrast to discomfort, dissatisfaction, discontentment, distrust, and disrespect. A few participants said that they usually find that these elements have vanished due to other associated factors of conflict within marriage.

Character Assassination

Character assassination is a subtle yet deeply harmful form of emotional abuse that plays a significant role in pushing women toward initiating divorce in Pakistan. It involves the systematic destruction of a woman's reputation, dignity, or moral integrity, often by her husband, in-laws, or both. It may include the accusation, blaming, public shaming, defaming in social circles, and allegations of infidelity. In a collectivistic culture, a woman's honor is linked with the dignity and honor of her natal family. This is one of the reasons why women get support to initiate divorce, mostly in those cases where woman gets baseless and immoral doubts and labels for them in wider social circles, community, and many times at workplaces. A respondent shared that:

My husband used character assassination as a tool to defame me at my workplace and linked my name with my colleague just to make me feel inferior in personal and public domains and to show me that it's my punishment for being a defiant wife. I left him to save my soul. It was unbearable for me to tolerate the bad comments on my character and I felt it was tougher to explain it to my kids about my character, so, I thought to untie the knot which is suffocating me (Fatima, 32).

Women's realization of their dignity, rights and emotional safety is increasing in contemporary societies and these are essential to sustain a healthy marriage. Nowadays, self-worth, dignity and respect is the expectation of every woman and the absence of these factors makes the marital bond weak and breakable.

A female shared: The character assassination by the husband and in-laws is so strong that a woman can't justify herself. Her loyalty and faithfulness invested in the relationship flew away after a while. My husband tried to ruin my character by spreading the news to my relatives that I was divorced by him and I was living in a Haraam relationship. There was no legal notice received by me and I was living with his parents and one daughter. After this level of cruelty and disrespectfulness, I decided to quit from this marriage. (P15, 35)

In countries like Pakistan, the respect and character of a woman are the major gains of their lives. To attain this they struggled in their private and public lives. But character assassination is the reason where Pakistani woman finds herself damaged and leave their mistrusted marriages.

Mismatched Marriages End at Divorce

Finding a perfect match is a right of every individual. The forced marriage or inappropriate match makes a couple more vulnerable to marital conflict and dissolution. Women are usually compelled to go into a marriage as it's a choice of their parents and other family members for the collective good of the family. Some of the respondents

shared that mental compatibility is an important element of a successful marriage. Showing dissatisfaction at the time of tying the marital knot can make the couple vulnerable towards break-ups when they start a journey on disagreements, uncommon likings, and differences of educational, economical and religious compatibility. One of the respondents shared;

“I told my parents that I had someone in my life and I had no chance to move on with a person whom I did not know. But I was married against my will. My disapproval was so loud that it made my relationship with my husband worse.” (P35)

She further added: In my marriage, no one ever understood me, including my ex-husband or his family. They have issues with MYSELF, my thoughts, likings, preferences, and feelings and when nobody understood me, I decided to quit the marriage, because my 2-year-old was suffering, observing and absorbing the negativity in that house. Three lives were already suffering and the social pressure of extending the family was so stressful for me that I had to decide to divorce (P4, 35).

The dilemmas of mismatched couples start in the initial days of marriage and prevail so strongly that ultimately they decouple themselves. Forced marriages for the sake of collective benefits, familial bonds and caste preference still exist in contemporary days. Moreover, the participation and opinion of women are considered to be unnecessary as it is the function of the family network to provide support in the decision-making of marriage to women as well as men.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight that women in Pakistan typically resort to divorce not out of convenience but as a consequence of deeply rooted, unresolvable marital issues. Emotional neglect, physical, emotional and economic abuse, contagious violence, infidelity and mismatches are the emerging themes and findings of the participant's account. Many women who seek their divorce after 5 years discussed that after putting all the efforts to make their marriages work they ultimately chose divorce when they were not able to cope within this relationship. It indicates the silent sufferings, social pressures and stigma make women weak in initiating divorce despite their educational and economic empowerment. A key insight from this study is the lack of institutional support available to couples in distress. Most participants noted that family mediation was biased against them. The absence of structured marital support systems leads to situations where problems fester until divorce becomes the only viable solution. These interventions must be culturally sensitive and locally contextualized to be effective. A marriage institution that provides early and equitable support has the potential to not only reduce the rate of divorce but also enhance the quality of marital life.

Marital infidelity is one of the strongest reasons for women-initiating divorce in Pakistani society. Previous research also indicates that marital infidelity is a threat to a stable marriage and leads to conflict and dissolution of marriage (Rahimi et al., 2019). Mohlatole et al. (2017) also described infidelity as 'adultery' and 'cheating' on one's partner. Its prevalence in marriage is almost in every culture, and it is one of the strong reasons for the increasing divorce rate in contemporary days. The decision to divorce becomes easy when one knows that this decision will bring a good future for them. People go for it with the hope of betterment, when their kids suffer in marriage (Her & Hiong, 2023). Puspitasari et al., 2020). Mismatched marriages are increasingly recognized

as a major reason behind women initiating divorce in Pakistan. These marriages often result from family pressure, lack of proper compatibility assessment, or traditional arranged setups where the couple barely knows each other before marriage. When fundamental differences in values, lifestyles, or personalities emerge, sustaining the relationship becomes difficult. Women, especially those who are educated and financially independent, are less willing to remain in emotionally unfulfilling or incompatible marriages. As Rehman and Qureshi (2019) state, "Many women reported that their marriage was based on family decisions rather than personal choice, leading to emotional disconnect and lack of understanding." Such mismatches often result in ongoing conflict, frustration, and mental distress. As societal attitudes shift and women gain more awareness of their rights, they are more likely to pursue divorce as a means to reclaim personal peace and autonomy when the marital relationship becomes untenable.

Educational and economic empowerment provide safety nets to women, and they challenge the oppressive, violent structures. But working women are also victimised by the labelling of disobedient and deviant from traditional gender roles. However, emotional fulfilment, disrespect, feelings of worthlessness are important for contemporary women, and they also leave the "empty shells" when they feel chronic emotional neglect. Women considered these elements as harmful as abuse to their peace and personal dignity.

The expression "violence is contagious" describes how exposure to maltreatment can lead to additional violence. In Pakistan, many women who are locked in abusive marriages face escalating cycles of emotional, verbal, and physical abuse. Concerned about their children's well-being, they frequently choose divorce to save them from inheriting trauma. Despite cultural pressure to remain silent, increased awareness and education enable women to reject the assumption that suffering abuse is virtuous. Domestic violence causes permanent psychological and physical harm. Women who seek divorce are not only avoiding danger, but also breaking generational trends and choosing safety, dignity, and a healthier future for themselves and their children.

Conclusion

The findings of this research depict the distinctive reasons for women-initiated divorce when nothing works in their marriage, and the ultimate solution they find is a legal divorce. The judgment of a woman in marriage is based on her domestic efficiencies; however, the time and role constraints of a working woman are unaddressed. This study brings forward the often-silenced voices of Pakistani women who initiate divorce after exhausting all other avenues. Divorce, in these contexts, is not a sign of failure but a courageous response to ongoing harm. By understanding the depth of their experiences, this research sheds light on critical gaps in support structures that, if addressed, can strengthen the institution of marriage rather than undermine it. Interventions that empower both partners, foster empathy, and create equitable platforms for resolution can shift the culture from endurance to functionality. Ultimately, safeguarding the sanctity of marriage requires protecting the dignity and well-being of those within it.

Recommendations

The findings of the current study bring forth some important recommendations at the micro and macro level. There is a room of improvement in the family institutions and regulated norms to be adaptable with the increasing social change.

- Importance should be given to pre-marital counselling in educational institutions to promote healthy relationships, expectations, Gender roles and rights within marriage and family domains.
- Establish Support and Counselling networks (accessible and confidential) to provide couples with support and intervention in resolving conflicts before they go towards the divorce.
- Media, Community Influencers should educate the extended families to provide support in conflict among couples.
- Basic and distinctive reasons of divorce should be addressed in educational curricula, community sessions, social welfare organizations with proper solutions and interventions.

These recommendations can be effective for the functional and stable family and marriage institutions.

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