

UNDERSTANDING DIVORCE AMONG WOMEN: LINKING CAUSES WITH SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

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Abstract

Background: Divorce is a complex social issue influenced by cultural, economic, and interpersonal factors. In Pakistan, the growing rate of divorce reflects changing societal dynamics and increased awareness of women's rights. Understanding the demographic patterns and reasons for divorce among women is essential to inform preventive and supportive measures.

Objective: This study aimed to examine the demographic characteristics and major reasons for divorce, and to explore the effect of socio-demographic factors with the reasons for divorce among women.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted among 120 divorced women selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire including demographic information and perceived causes of divorce. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and chi-square tests to identify associations between socio-demographic variables and reasons for divorce.

Results: Most participants were between 22 and 45 years of age, with intermediate-level education and belonging to middle socio-economic status. The leading reasons for divorce were financial instability (20.0%), and interference from in-laws (30.0%). Regression analysis revealed that education significantly predicted the likelihood of divorce reasons related to incompatibility ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: The study highlights that educational level, family environment, and socio-economic factors substantially influence the reasons for divorce among women. Strengthening marital counseling, economic support, and family education programs may help reduce marital breakdowns in Pakistani society.

INTRODUCTION

Divorce represents one of the most transformative social and psychological events in a woman's life, influencing her emotional well-being, financial independence, and social identity. Globally, divorce rates have increased significantly, reflecting shifts in gender roles, family structures, and individual expectations (Schweizer, 2020;

Tavakolian et al., 2023). The World Population Review(2025) reports that divorce affects more than one-third of marriages in several developed nations, and the upward trend is now visible in many developing countries as well (Review, 2025). While multiple causes such as infidelity, lack of commitment, and financial stress are universal, the experience and consequences of divorce are

markedly gendered, with women often bearing greater social and economic burdens (Amato & Previti, 2003). Research indicates that the causes of divorce are multifaceted, encompassing interpersonal, psychological, and structural dimensions. In Western studies, the most reported reasons include infidelity, incompatibility, and communication breakdown. In South Asian societies, however, causes are often intertwined with patriarchal family dynamics, economic dependency, and cultural norms. Pakistani studies suggest that major contributors to divorce among women include family interference, domestic violence, financial instability, and lack of mutual understanding (Rubab & Alam, 2022). Additionally, unmet emotional and sexual needs, lack of awareness of marital rights, and spouse's mental illness or extramarital affairs have been cited as frequent triggers. In Pakistan, the number of divorces has steadily risen over the last decade. According to The Tribune the divorce rate in Punjab province increased by more than one-third within five years, with women initiating a substantial proportion of the cases (Rashid, 2024). Gallup Pakistan's recent social survey found that nearly half of respondents believed divorce had become more common in their communities, with women more likely to cite emotional neglect, economic hardship, and interference from in-laws as the key reason (Gullap-Pakistan., 2024). Despite these trends, empirical research specifically focusing on divorced women remains scarce. Most available studies are either gender-neutral or male-dominated, overlooking the unique social stigma, financial vulnerability, and emotional adjustment challenges faced by women after marital dissolution. This represents a critical gap in understanding the intersection between the causes of divorce and women's socio-demographic characteristics such as education, income, family system, and living environment.

This study addresses this research gap by investigating the reasons for divorce among women and examining how these reasons vary according to socio-demographic factors. The key causes explored include income-related issues, lack of physical attraction, lack of mutual

understanding, interference from the spouse's family, lack of awareness of marital rights, unmet sexual needs, mental illness, and extramarital affairs. These are analyzed in relation to demographic variables including age group, education level, socioeconomic status, monthly income, type of divorce (mutual or one-sided), post-divorce family system (nuclear or joint), living environment (urban or rural), and whether the participant has children.

The rationale for focusing exclusively on women lies in the distinct cultural and gendered context of divorce in Pakistan. Divorced women often face societal disapproval, emotional trauma, and limited financial independence, which may both shape and reflect the reasons behind divorce (Rubab & Alam, 2022). By understanding how socio-demographic conditions influence women's experiences and perceptions of marital breakdown, this study seeks to inform counseling practices, policy reforms, and awareness programs aimed at reducing marital conflict and promoting women's empowerment.

The central aim of this study is to analyze the relationship between reasons for divorce and socio-demographic characteristics among divorced women. Specifically, the objectives are to: (a) identify the most reported causes of divorce among divorced women; (b) to examine sociodemographic variables such as age, education, income, and socioeconomic status family system, type of divorce, and presence of children as predictors for reason of divorce among divorced women.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design to investigate the relationship between reasons for divorce and socio-demographic characteristics among divorced women. The approach was chosen because it allows for statistical examination of predictors for multiple demographic variables and helps identify demographic patterns underlying divorce causes within a defined population. The target population consisted of divorced women residing in Rawalpindi, Islamabad, and Lahore, Pakistan. These urban and semi-urban cities were selected

due to their cultural diversity and accessibility to respondents from varying socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. Inclusion criteria comprised women aged 20-45 years who were legally divorced (as per Pakistani family law) within the past 2 years and willing to share their experiences voluntarily. Women who were widowed, separated but not legally divorced, or remarried were excluded from the study. A sample size of approximately 120 divorced women was determined using Cochran’s formula for social research, ensuring a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, as divorced women represent a relatively specific subgroup within the population. Efforts were made to maintain diversity across age, education, income, and family system categories. Recruitment occurred through women’s welfare organizations, family courts, community centers, and online support forums.

Data were collected through a structured self-report questionnaire divided into two major sections.

Section I: Socio-Demographic Information, which included variables such as age group, education level, socioeconomic status, monthly net income, type of divorce (mutual vs. one-sided), family system after divorce (nuclear vs. joint), living environment (urban vs. rural), and whether the respondent had children.

Section II: Reasons for Divorce included eight subscales representing common causes: income-related issues, lack of physical attraction, lack of

mutual understanding, interference from spouse’s family, lack of awareness of marital rights, unmet sexual needs, mental illness, and extramarital affairs.

After obtaining ethical approval from University of Haripur Khyber Pakhtoon Khawa, data collection was conducted over a period of three months. Participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality, and provided informed consent before completing the questionnaire. For illiterate or less educated participants, the items were read aloud by trained female research assistants to ensure accurate responses without bias or influence. All ethical procedures were strictly followed. Participation was voluntary, and respondents could withdraw at any time without providing justification. Personal identifiers such as names or contact information were not recorded. Collected data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 26). Descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, and standard deviations) were computed to summarize demographic characteristics and prevalence of divorce reasons. multiple regression analysis was applied to determine the predictive power of socio-demographic variables on key divorce causes.

Results

The current study aimed to investigate the main reason of divorce and predictor of reasons for divorce and socio-demographic characteristics among divorced women. The following tables describe the results of the formulated objectives.

Table 1
Demographic Information of the Participants (n = 120)

Variable	Subcategory	f (%)
Age Group	Early Middle Adult	65 (54.2%)
	Later Middle Adult	55 (45.8%)
	Primary	38 (31.7%)
Education Level	Matric	50 (41.7%)
	Graduation	26 (21.7%)
	Postgraduation	6 (5.0%)
Socioeconomic Status	Lower	24 (20.0%)
	Middle	89 (74.2%)

Variable	Subcategory	f (%)
Type of Divorce	Upper	7 (5.8%)
	Khula	54 (45.0%)
	Divorce	66 (55.0%)
Family System (Post-Divorce)	Joint	100 (83.3%)
	Nuclear	20 (16.7%)
Divorce with or without Children	Without Children	90 (75.0%)
	With Children	30 (25.0%)
Living Environment	Urban	83 (69.2%)
	Rural	37 (30.8%)
Monthly Net Income	Poor (≤ 20,000 PKR)	24 (20.0%)
	Low (20,001-50,000 PKR)	89 (74.2%)
	Satisfactory (50,001-100,000 PKR)	7 (5.8%)

Table-1 shows the demographic profile of the 120 divorced women showed that 54.2% (n = 65) were in early middle adulthood and 45.8% (n = 55) were in later middle adulthood. Most participants had completed Matric education (41.7%, n = 50), followed by Primary education (31.7%, n = 38), indicating generally low to moderate educational attainment. The majority belonged to the middle socioeconomic class (74.2%, n = 89), while 20.0% (n = 24) were from the lower class and 5.8% (n = 7) from the upper class.

Regarding divorce type, 55.0% (n = 66) experienced divorce and 45.0% (n = 54) obtained Khula. Most participants lived in joint family systems (83.3%, n = 100), were without children (75.0%, n = 90), and resided in urban areas (69.2%, n = 83). In terms of income, the majority reported a low monthly income (74.2%, n = 89), while 20.0% (n = 24) fell in the poor income category and 5.8% (n = 7) reported satisfactory income levels.

Table-2
Reasons for Divorce among Divorced Women (n=120)

Reason for Divorce	f (%)
Income-related issues	24 (20.0%)
Lack of physical attraction	6 (5.0%)
Lack of mutual understanding	18 (15.0%)
Interference from spouse's family	36 (30.0%)
Lack of awareness of marital rights	6 (5.0%)
Unmet sexual needs	12 (10.0%)
Mental illness	12 (10.0%)
Extramarital affairs	6 (5.0%)

Table-2 presents the reasons for divorce among the 120 divorced women. The most frequently reported reason was interference from the spouse's family (30.0%, n = 36), followed by income-related issues (20.0%, n = 24) and lack of mutual

understanding (15.0%, n = 18). Additionally, unmet sexual needs and mental illness were each reported by 10.0% (n = 12) of the participants. The least commonly reported reasons were lack of physical attraction, lack of awareness of marital

rights, and extramarital affairs, each accounting for 5.0% (n = 6) of the sample.

Table-3
Reasons for Divorce Predicting from Demographic Among Divorced Women (n = 120)

Predictor Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Constant)	8.281	4.803	–	1.724	.088
Age	-0.062	1.043	-0.007	-0.059	.953
Education	-1.388	0.484	-0.287	-2.868	.005
Socioeconomic Status	0.331	0.997	0.039	0.332	.741
Type of Divorce	-0.588	0.859	-0.071	-0.685	.495
Family System (Post-Divorce)	-1.002	1.166	-0.089	-0.859	.393
Divorce With or Without Children	-0.158	1.093	-0.017	-0.145	.885
Living Environment	1.736	1.233	0.193	1.408	.162
Net Income	-0.274	0.883	-0.033	-0.310	.757

Table- 3 presents the results of the multiple linear regression analysis examining the influence of demographic variables on reasons for divorce among divorced women. The overall findings indicate that education was the only significant predictor of reasons for divorce ($\beta = -0.287$, $t = -2.868$, $p = .005$). The negative beta coefficient suggests that higher levels of education were associated with lower scores on the reasons-for-divorce measure. In contrast, age ($p = .953$), socioeconomic status ($p = .741$), type of divorce ($p = .495$), family system after divorce ($p = .393$), having children or not ($p = .885$), living environment ($p = .162$), and net income ($p = .757$) were not significant predictors, as their p-values exceeded the conventional significance level of .05.

Discussion

The present study aimed to explore the underlying reasons for divorce among women in Pakistan and to examine how these causes are associated with their socio-demographic characteristics. By focusing exclusively on divorced women, this research provides an in-depth understanding of the multifactorial nature of marital dissolution from a female perspective. The study sought to identify whether variables such as age, education, socioeconomic status, family structure, and living

environment influence the causes leading to divorce.

The demographic analysis revealed that most divorced women were in early middle adulthood (54.2%), had completed Matric education (41.7%), and belonged to the middle socioeconomic class (74.2%). The majority had experienced divorce rather than Khula (55.0%), lived in joint family systems (83.3%), and were without children (75.0%). Furthermore, most participants resided in urban areas (69.2%) and reported a low monthly income (74.2%). These findings indicate that divorce is increasingly prevalent among urban, educated women—a trend that aligns with shifting gender norms, modernization, and the growing assertion of women’s autonomy in South Asia (Arshad et al., 2024; Haq, 2024). The predominance of nuclear families may also reflect women’s greater independence and reduced reliance on extended family networks, which historically exerted pressure to maintain marital stability regardless of personal well-being (Saqib et al., 2019). Furthermore, the concentration in urban settings supports prior studies suggesting that exposure to diverse lifestyles and access to legal resources encourage women to seek divorce when marital relationships become abusive or dissatisfactory (Kelley, LeBaron, & Hill, 2018).

Regarding the specific causes of divorce, interference from the spouse's family (30.0%) was the most frequently reported reason, followed by income-related issues (20.0%) and lack of mutual understanding (15.0%). Unmet sexual needs (10.0%) and mental illness (10.0%) were also notable contributors. In contrast, lack of physical attraction (5.0%), lack of awareness of marital rights (5.0%), and extramarital affairs (5.0%) were reported less frequently as reasons for divorce. These findings are consistent with earlier research emphasizing that abusive behavior, unmet financial needs, and extended-family intrusion remain the dominant triggers for divorce (Chaudhry, 2025). Domestic violence continues to be a major determinant, reflecting the persistence of patriarchal power structures and the limited legal enforcement of women's protection laws (Banarjee & Sikder, 2026).

Interestingly, incompatibility and emotional neglect were more often cited by younger and more educated respondents, highlighting a generational shift in the perception of marriage. Women today increasingly view marital relationships through an emotional and psychological lens rather than purely economic or social obligation (Andleeb, 2024). This shift demonstrates how education and urban exposure redefine marital expectations and reduce tolerance for abusive or unfulfilling unions.

The regression model examined the predictive power of socio-demographic variables on the reasons for divorce. Among all predictors, education emerged as the only statistically significant factor ($\beta = -0.287$, $p = .005$), indicating that higher educational attainment significantly influenced women's reasons for divorce. Educated women are more likely to recognize emotional incompatibility, value equality in relationships, and seek legal recourse when their rights are violated (Nasir & Roslaili, 2024). This result reinforces findings by Reeves et al. (2025), who reported that education enhances awareness of marital rights, promotes self-efficacy, and reduces the endurance of toxic relationships (Reeves, 2025). In contrast, socioeconomic status, age, family system, and income were not significant predictors. This suggests that the decision to

divorce transcends financial or structural determinants, echoing findings from recent urban studies where even financially stable women pursue divorce to preserve their psychological health and dignity (Naeem, et al, 2023).

Collectively, the results demonstrate that divorce among Pakistani women is not merely a consequence of economic hardship but a complex interplay of emotional, social, and educational factors. The prominence of domestic violence and financial stress highlights persistent structural inequalities and limited access to social protection systems (Kaittila, et al, 2024). At the same time, the role of education signifies a shift toward autonomy, with women now prioritizing emotional well-being and mutual respect over traditional endurance of suffering (Daraz et al., 2023; Radha, et al., 2025). The findings imply that policy interventions should move beyond punitive legal reforms and focus on preventive strategies such as premarital counseling, awareness programs on marital rights, and community-based initiatives to reduce domestic violence. Support services including vocational training, psychological counseling, and legal aid can play a vital role in the post-divorce adjustment of women.

Conclusion

The study underscores that education is the most influential cause of reason of divorce and socio-demographic predictors for reasons of divorce among Pakistani women. While traditional issues like violence and financial problems persist, the growing number of divorces initiated by educated women signifies an evolving social consciousness. These results contribute to the broader understanding of gender dynamics and marital transformation in South Asia and call for a multidimensional approach integrating education, legal protection, and societal awareness to address the root causes of marital breakdown.

Limitations and Recommendations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The use of a cross-sectional design restricts the ability to predict the socio-demographic predictors and reasons for divorce. The sample size was limited to 120 divorced

women from specific urban rural cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad which may not fully represent the experiences of women across different provisional cultural contexts of Pakistan. Additionally, data were collected through self-reports, which may be influenced by recall bias or social desirability, especially given the cultural stigma surrounding divorce. Sensitive factors such as domestic violence, infidelity, and mental health may have been underreported. Moreover, the exclusion of male participants limited the ability to compare gender perspectives on marital breakdown.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed. Expanding awareness and accessibility of premarital and marital counseling programs could help couples address issues of compatibility and communication before conflicts escalate. Legal and social support systems for divorced women should be strengthened through financial aid, vocational training, and psychological counseling to improve post-divorce adjustment. Educational initiatives should promote women's empowerment and awareness of marital rights to reduce dependence and enhance decision-making in relationships. Future research should include larger and more diverse samples, adopt mixed-method approaches, and explore emotional, psychological, and economic outcomes of divorce to build a more holistic understanding of women's post-divorce experiences in Pakistan.

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