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Problems faced by divorced women in their pre and post-divorce period: A sociological study with reference to District Meerut

Pooja Rathi and JP Pachauri

Abstract

Divorce as a social issue which involves the legal dissolution of marriage and the couple is separated. A divorce happen after a husband and wife decided not to live together anymore due to their family problem. They agree to sign legal paper that makes them each single and again allow them to marry other people if they want to do so. In addition, the study investigated pre and post-divorce challenges and problems faced by divorced women. Both primary and secondary sources have been used for data collection for this study. The primary data have been collected through purposively selected interviewees specifically used structured interview schedule. Universe of the present study is divorced women of Meerut city. It was not possible to contact every divorced woman for interview. Therefore it has been decided to collect the cases from family court of Meerut district. After doing lot of exercise only 60 case diaries of divorced women were collected from family court. Efforts were made to contact all the 60 divorced women, but due to non-availability on the given addresses only 38 women were contacted. Data were tabulated and results are given through case studies. On the basis of this study we can concluded that divorcee women faced various difficulties and challenges related to social, familial, financial, emotional and psychological problems. Divorce women heavy family support was facing fewer problems in comparison to those women having no family support.

Keywords: Women, Divorce challenges: social, familial, financial, emotional, psychological

1. Introduction

Divorce is the “legal dissolution of a socially and legally recognized marital relationship that alters the obligations and privileges of the two persons involved. It is also a major life transition that has far-reaching social, pathological, legal, personal, economic, and personal consequences” (Price & Mc kenry, 1983). In general terms it is considered as the ending of a marriage. A breakup in relationship is certainly the most terrible situation for a person that results into an emotional setback. The mental health indicators which are affected by divorce relate to depression, anger, low self-esteem, and anxiety. The person concerned may blame himself/herself for such a mishap. “Divorce leads to poor psychological and physical health in women” in Iowa on a sample of 416 rural mothers. The results revealed that divorced women have a higher susceptibility to chronic illness, especially over a period of time compared with married women. A stressful life event has also shown to have affected the psychological health of these women after the divorce.

Divorce has become a serious problem; challenging the establishment of the family in a routine manner and causing severe impacts on the emotional and mental health of the individual especially, women. Since women are considered as the binding force in the family, they are believed to be responsible for whatever wrong is done. It has been argued that women invest more in the family, take a larger responsibility for marriage, and therefore perceive divorce as a greater failure than men do (Kurdek, 1990 Hung, Kung & Chan, 2004, Cited in Sharma, 2011) [3]. I have defined divorce as judicial separation of the spouses and completely disruption of their marital relations. This research has been focused to identify vital causes of divorce under the specific circumstances; socio-economic differentiations, occupational status, family background, role conflict, physical defectives, educational differentiation and legal ground.

Methodology

Area of the study: This study is confined to Meerut District. Meerut is a city in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. The city lies 70 km. northeast of the national capital New Delhi, and 453 Km. northwest of the state capital, Lucknow. Meerut district was divided into three tehsils namely Meerut, Mawana and Sardhana.

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The city was administered by Meerut municipal, corporation, which was responsible for performing civic administrative functions. The city was also an education hub in western Uttar Pradesh. Meerut city has a cosmopolitan nature also it represents rural and urban continuum up to a fair extent. Its culture was a mixture of tradition and modernity. I opted Meerut city because as per my knowledge there had not been any research work done on the topic of divorce in this area, while the cases of divorce are increasing day by day.

Universe and Sample

Universe of the present study is divorced women of Meerut city. It was not possible to contact every divorced woman in Meerut city for interview. Therefore it has been decided to collect the cases from family court of Meerut district. After doing lot of exercise only 60 case diaries of divorced women were collected from family court. Efforts were made to contact all the 60 divorced women, but due to non availability on the given addresses only 38 women were contacted. All the 38 women were interview through structured interview schedule.

Data Collection

On the basis of the objective of the study, a interview schedule was framed for data collection. It was pre-tested and necessary modifications were made in the interview schedule. Besides personal interview case studies were also carried out to collect in depth information from the respondents. The respondents were contacted by home visits to elicit the required information. Flexibility of questions was maintained, if the respondents were not able to respond accurately, then the same question was asked in a different way. Since responses were recorded on the basis of interview-schedule as well as observation. Data were tabulated and results are given through case studies.

Analysis and interpretation of data

After getting the data, efforts were made to analyze the data. Data analysis of 38 cases have been analyzed and interrelated as expressed by the respondents. This description has been defined through case study method.

Limitations of the study

A lot of difficulties were faced while undertaking this study due to the sensitive nature and the confidentiality of the issue. To begin with, indentifying the respondents (Divorced women) it was a difficult task. The efforts have been made to know the status of divorced women and what are the problems and challenges they faced in pre and post divorce life. This study is limited to Meerut city only. Therefore conclusions cannot generalize.

Problems faced by divorced women during their divorced cases and after the divorce: There were several problems which were faced by the respondents in their pre and post divorce life. Divorcee women faced various difficulties and challenges related to social, familial, financial, emotional and psychological problems.

Problems of Pre-Marital life

Problems faced by Mother-in-law: It was found that some informants were not having good relations with their mother-in-law. Case no. A revealed, that *“My mother-in-law always gave comments to me about giving birth to female child because she gives preference to male child. My sister-in-law*

also treated my daughter as a curse But I had no option except to tolerate these derogatory comments”.

Another informant case no. P revealed different experiences. As she stated, *“My in-laws behavior was rude and unfair towards me due to the reason of dowry. They tortured me physically. Once they didn't give me food for seven days and on the seventh day they poured kerosene oil on my entire body and lit the matchstick. Due to this my whole body burnt. I couldn't even think of remarriage as who will accept me in this situation”.*

Harassment by father-in-law

Two informants shared that their father-in-law wanted with them physical intimacy. It was the main cause of their marital termination. One informant case no. O stated, *“My father-in-law and brother-in-law continue harassed me for sex with him. My father-in-law used to say that I got you married to my son because I want to have sexual relationship with you. Thus I brought you in this house for me not for my son. I was exhausted mentally and physically by tolerating him”.*

Problems faced with sister-in-law

Another case no. A revealed *“My separated sister-in-law also stays with my marital family. She always tried to brain wash my husband against me. This aggravated the violent behavior of my husband towards me. Also presence of her kids increased the quarrels”.*

Respondents also stated that if their husband would have loved them then they would have easily tolerated the exploitation, but the disrespect and the problems such as: husband non-supportive nature, exploitative behavior, indifferent attitude became more problematic for them. In addition to this there were serious problems which were intolerable for the informants. They were: husband involvement in extra-marital affairs; comment for male child, physically emotionally, verbally and mentally tortured; alcoholism and drug addiction, cheating, abnormal behavior; emotional attachment and the pressure of dowry.

Post- Divorce Problems

After divorce informants faced different type of problems such as: social rejection, blame by relatives and siblings, family support, challenges related to getting a separate house, economic hardships, harassment and exploitation, problems related to emotional attachment, psychological problems such as: depression, health problem, tried to kill herself, trauma, feeling loneliness and lack in confidence.

Social Rejection

Few stories of women revealed that divorce resulted social rejection. Some of the respondents also shared that they were treated as belonging to a different group because of their divorce. And they did not share same kind of relationship with her friends as earlier. They stated that the status of divorced women deteriorated as compared to married one. They feel ashamed that they are no longer married and too frightened to make contact with old friends. They also shared that before marriage and after marriage friends have same relationship but when they know about divorce they try to keep distance due to their social prestige. As case no. I stated *“After I become a divorced woman, my relation with my friends deteriorated. Many of my friends did not want to spare time with me. I was working as a teacher in an institution. But after I become a divorced woman. I was forced to change my*

jobs frequently because co-workers and friends behaved with me rudely, due to the reason of my divorced status”.

From the above narration, one can understand that the life & social status of divorced women are negatively affected their life in the family and society.

Nine of the informants shared that they did not have the same relation with their siblings as it was before divorce. Few of them indentified the reasons for the bad relation with the siblings. As case no. B stated: *“After my divorce the environment in my mother’s house was unexpected and unbelievable to me because I saw a change in my brother’s and sister’s attitude towards me. They did not accuse me directly but their behavior was totally changed. Sometimes they made me to understand that I am a stranger in that house. So I should not involve in family decisions and matters. Since my two children were very small and I had to stay only with my mother because my father was not alive”.*

Blame

Few of the informants shared that they were blamed for their divorce, especially by their relatives or some times by their siblings Case no. B reported about how her elder brother blamed her as follows;

“My elder brother blamed me for my divorce. Moreover my other siblings did not try to understand what psychological pressure. I was passing through. However I tolerated all this because of my children. Some of my relatives said that you are responsible for the dissolution of your marriage, they also blamed me for my incapacity to continue my conjugal life”.

Another case no. R also faced same experience she shared

“After my divorce I lived with my family. After three or four months I see the difference in their attitudes, especially with my elder brother and sister-in-law. They did not accuse me directly but they show me by their attitudes as if it was a question of my womanhood that I could not continue my marriage. It was very difficult for me to adjust with them. I was forced to be isolated from them in every possible way to avoid these humiliations”.

Family Support

Majority of the divorced women reported that they lived with their parent’s house immediately after their divorce in which few shared that they had not good relations with their parents at the beginning because their parents were under mental pressure due to the social stigma. Most of the respondent found strength from their children and parents who provide great motivation to help them to move forward Respondent case no. H expressed the way how she overcomes the problems in the following manners;

“After my divorce my family members helped and supported me. They accepted me and made my life easier by not blaming me and reminding me of the divorce. I am working in a media sector. Environment at my work place was not that much challenging for me, because I didn’t share to anyone about my divorcee status. I always pretend to wear an engagement ring to hide my status”.

Another case no: E revealed

“I opted love marriage without my parents consent. They broke off all the relations with me. So I couldn’t take help from them. I got support from my children’s encouraging words. They use to told me don’t worry we are always with you. We will work hard to make life better don’t take tension about father what, he had done to you. These words

encouraged me and helped me to overcome the difficulties of the post-divorce life”.

Listening to women experiences, that how family supports them to a great extent. If the parents do not give support then it was very difficult for them to come out from the difficulties or trauma. After divorce for a daughter her parents support is very important. If her parents do not support her then this condition becomes worse for her life.

Challenges related to getting a separate house

According to the data obtained during interview, researcher found that before getting divorce only five informants stayed separately while thirty three informants lived with parents. Two participants shared that they did love marriage therefore their parents didn’t support them after their. They tried to find a separate house for themselves but being a divorce woman was unable to get it. The story taken from the following one woman illustrates this point very well.

Respondent case no: M narrated the case as follows

*“After my divorce I wanted to live with my parents. But my father didn’t allow me to live with them as he was annoyed of decision of love marriage. Even my brother and sister-in-law told me to leave my natal house..... It was difficult for me to accept the indifferent behavior of my siblings. It was a big challenge for me. I was worried about my daughter’s security. My mother was also silent on those situations, but without telling anybody she arranged two rooms set and helped me financially. If she wouldn’t have helped me then the situation would have been more critical”.*In a different way, the difficulty of getting a separate house also narrated by participant Case no: R that the worst problem she faced as a result of her divorce is to getting a separate house. As she shared,

“After divorce I felt alone and helpless. For this condition my elder brother and sister-in-law were responsible, my children were with my ex-husband, so there was no liability upon me. I was rejected by one of my close friend and brother. I was all alone”.

Harassment and Exploitation

Harassment, exploitation suppression in her pre and post divorce life was explained. As case no: G stated,

“After divorce my dignity was Steered in the society because in our society men look at a divorced woman in a more dirty ways than an unmarried woman. If divorcee women are not educated and independent then she faces more problems to adjust herself in society. They treat a divorced woman as if she is physically and financially needy. After my divorce, I was working in a house as a maid. One day when I was working there that time only head of the family was there he was about 40 years old found me alone and pressed my breasts. It was uneasy. I felt bad but could not do anything as he was of high caste. After some time I raised my voice but everyone blamed me that I am responsible for that incident. I was disturbed and I had to suffer mentally”.

Another case no: K stated different views

“My husband was an irresponsible human being. The nights were mostly night of verbal or physical fight. I used to accuse him of spoiling my life while had the same words, comments and tone for me in return slowly, he become a drunkard. I was a mother and always dreamed that someday I would leave this man for better future of my child. Many a times my mother-in-law locked the kitchen so that I could not cook food and thus

they harassed me in this way. I was a silent spectator. But I was exploited in the family. I feel suffocated and wanted to find a way out of this situation”.

Case no: L statement are given below

“No doubt, I meet them for short period. I have understood their choices, their desires and what they expected from me. I had never imagined that kind of life for me. Physically was not satisfied with him. No matter he always tried hard for taking more time. He was physically strong, he tortured me physically while having sex, my husband had no good ways but he acted like an animal. It was disgusting and irritating for me”.

Economic hardships of divorced women

Economic aspect is the crucial, dominant and effective component of the society. Every happiness, trust, support and sympathy or tension, clash, quarrel and maladjustment or marital incompatibility in the family is the causes of economic factors. The divorce rate is higher in spouses have more expectation from each other, faced economic hardship and gone far from their residence due to the economic achievement. (Johnson and Wu, 2002; Lorenz *et al*, 1997) [7].

The other theme that identified was economic consequences of divorce on women. The problem of women after divorce is an economic issue also. Family member has different reactions to divorce and separation. Sometimes, spousal support and child support is denied to women, when this happens, women are put under tremendous stress to bear the burden of a single parent. Times were tough when there were two family members earning and now that it has come down to one, and that situation is very difficult to her. Most of the informants were not working before divorce, but they took jobs after their divorce to adjust to their economic expenses. The informants also reported that they started to work so that they did not become burdens to their families. Financial crises are a standing situation with some of the divorcee women. It becomes difficult in meeting the basic needs of children. As case no: G stated,

“Mental strength does not help if you don't have the main power to survive, that is, your economic capability. I am a maid servant. I earned for not myself but for the sake of my children's upbringing. I got little financial support from my parents because they are also very poor, and could only help me up to that level”.

Problems related to emotional attachment

Lack of emotional attachment was identified by few of the informants. Divorcees were not getting emotional support from their husband. One informant case no: E shared her experience:

“We were poor, the problem of food and adequate clothes were regular due to financial crunch. I didn't go to school. My father is a rickshaw puller and mother is a maid servant. My parents were abusive towards each other but emotionally they were very close. She again revealed that I had an affair with the local boy. I was in love with him. One day, he put vermilion to my head in front of a local temple. This way I got married without my parents consent. After that my parents broke off all the relations with me. I was emotionally attached with my husband but he never cared my emotions. He became drunker and abused me verbally. I don't have any cherished memory with him. Our relation became so bitter in later days that there was no space for love. Thus, this was totally unexpected end of dreams of my life”.

Psychological problems

The other identified theme was the psychological problems of divorce on divorced women that influenced directly or indirectly them. Under this broad category, there are sub themes which are categorized for an easy understanding. Based on the interviews conducted on divorced women, different forms of psychological problems were observed.

When the informants were asked about the psychological impacts of their divorce, majority of them reported that the divorce left them in depression and health problems, because they had not been able to continue their marriage for the rest of their life. As case no: B narrated, *“My relatives did not blame me directly; but they were always curious to discuss my divorce, which was embarrassing to me”.*

A similar view was also expressed by case no: M revealed, *“When I found that my relatives or other people tried to discuss my inability to continue my married life then I stopped meeting them, even I avoided general conversation with them. Because I wanted to forget the chapter of divorce in my life”.*

Health

One informant case no: E mentioned about her health problem because she was worried about her children's upbringing and their future. As she shared, *“After divorce my physical condition deteriorated very badly. I didn't want to take divorce because I was worried about my children basic needs. I was very upset and disappointed. I was very helpless concerning to handle all those things together. I was sick because of my mental stress. Even though I don't care what others think about my divorce. I couldn't overlook all problems”.*

Another case No: G stated, *“I faced problems related to finance because it was very difficult to me to upbringing the children in 4000/- rupees. It was not enough to fulfill even basic requirements of my and my kids. I couldn't provide two times meal to my children. By which my health was badly affected thus I was under mentally pressure”.*

Suicide: One informant tried to kill herself due to under the pressure of social stigma of divorce, as case no: L revealed, *“Many times I felt that there must be someone who can understand me. I feel alienated. At such time, I think of killing myself. My life has turned into ocean of pains; in the world I could not get someone who could relieve me of the pains. I was so depressed and felt loneliness. I have taken care of my parents but I could not take care of myself”.*

Trauma: Divorce is a social phenomenon. In sometimes it results in serious consequences that a divorced woman reaches to stage of trauma. As case no: C responded, *“My divorce is a biggest trauma in my life and now I am not interested in any activities, I am facing depression and the most difficult thing during the divorce process was paucity of money, the lawyer asked for money every now and then it took a long time for me to get divorced”.*

Feeling lonely and alone

The other form of psychological consequence that investigated through in depth interview was the problem of loneliness. Few participants expressed that their life as divorced woman was one of feeling lonely and alone. One informant case: F shared her experience, *“After divorce I faced many problems. It's a fact that males are always at higher and they have superior position in the society in comparison to women. To have divorce from my first*

husband was the biggest mistake I did. I must have adjusted with him because my second marriage proved more painful to me. At present I feel that I don't have anyone in my life to which I can tell and share my feelings. It had been very difficult for me to come out of the trauma and this has affected my health too. It completely shattered me and ruined my children's life".

Lack in confidence

Some of the informants shared that they started disbelieving themselves and tried to find out the loopholes in their personalities. Post divorce life broke their confidence. Up to the great extent that the victims felt that she is even not capable to do her daily routine works. Respondent case no: P expressed her experience of being divorce and its impact on her confidence. She used to think about remarrying but she didn't think a man would accept her know that she is the mother of three children and her face was full of burn scars as 50% of her body was burned when she was set ablaze by her husband and mother-in-law.

Discussion

This study attempts to investigate the challenges of pre and post divorce life of divorced women. On the basis of observation of earlier studies and field interview it can be concluded that there are many specific reasons for the friction, women play a central role in family relationships. When a new marriage is formed and another woman enters the family circle, a mother may believe, correctly, that she is less central in her son's life and may be ambivalent about giving up the close ties with him that she enjoyed in the past. A daughter-in-law may also be guarded because she does not know what to expect and whether she'll be accepted. Such anxieties create a sense of insecurity on both sides. Field interview also shows that among the problems from marital family the acrimonious relationship between the respondents and their mother-in-law is also responsible for the marital termination after their husband. Informants also shared that their mother-in-law's usually commented or explicated them for domestic chores; for male child, dowry and insecurity (mother-in-law feels insecure about her prime position in the family).

The behavior of the husband family towards a daughter-in-law after she enters the matrimonial home is remarkably ambivalent. On the one hand, there are great expectations from her. On the other, she is subjected to teasing and taunting by her matrimonial family. Such teasing and taunting may relate to her looks her way of dressing up, her family background or the dowry that she brought with her. If the daughter-in-law shows patience and for bear and the teasing and taunting remains within reasonable limits, things eventually improve and the daughter-in-law is able to carve out a place for herself in the family. However, if the teasing and taunting arises from some genuine grievance with respect to dowry, the way the marriage was arranged or the character of the daughter-in-law, it can persist and lead to family discord.

The reason given by some divorced women for expecting social problems after divorce is due to having a bad relationship with the relatives and siblings. The informants also shared that they were treated as belonging to a different group because of their divorce.

Majority of the divorcee women described in different ways the experience of rejection and social isolation as a result of their divorce. The social life and relationship of divorced women did have much difference from married one. On a

whole in our society the divorce are not welcome and approved and for this women are blamed more and their prestige in social strata also declines. In evaluating the role of the family as a source of social support It can be concluded that the divorced woman almost always returns to the family of her origin, either to her parents or siblings or to other relatives (Choudhary, 1988; Mehta, 1975; Pothen, 1986) ^[4, 5, 6]. In this paper researcher also found that majority of the respondent stated that they returned to the family, either to her parents or siblings after their divorce when respondents were asked that what type of role their parents play in their post divorce life then majority of them reported that after their divorce they lived with their parents. Some of them reported that at the beginning they were not having good relations as their parents were under mental pressure; social stigma in their daughter's life and they feel burden about their daughter's re-marriage, but later on their parents behavior changed, gradually they came out of their mental pressure and they accepted the truth of their daughter's life. The informants whose parents were not supportive towards them faced more social challenges in society and it was a big challenge to them to readjust in society. While the informants whose parents were supported towards them they faced fewer hardships to readjust in society. It shows that parents attitude and support plays an important role for their divorced daughter's for readjustment in society.

The economic problem of divorced women particularly those with children were more serious. Financial crises are a standing situation with some of the divorcee women. It becomes difficult in meeting the basic needs of children such as food, clothing, school fees, maintaining the previous standard of living and meet personal expense.

Most of the women, faced feeling of guilt, shame, resentment, anger, anxiety about future, feeling lonely and alone, trauma and depression after divorce. The effect of divorce on women has mental and emotional implications which shelter a women's self esteem. It influences women's ability to become a positive role model. She feels frightened considering herself alone and worthless with none to support or comfort her. Earlier studies shows, divorce is frequently accompanied by feelings of helplessness, anger, depression, guilt loneliness and other negative emotions (Booth & Amato, 1991).

Above discussion showed that divorce was a stressful experienced and puts an immense amount of strain or depression on divorced women. The marital termination was traumatic for the women since they feel they were defying the norms set by the society. Woman whose feelings of self esteem get affected, sometimes she starts thinking that this happened to her only because she was not a good person, which leads to self destruction and they feel lonely and alone and in turn depression. Due to trauma sometimes they opt suicide. Depression leads to feelings of anger and insecurity.

Conclusion

Divorce is multidimensional and it involves multifactor social events. It can be found in each and every society, which may be either in customary, or in legal form. Basically it occurs easily within more open and industrial society. It is emerging a form of new sociological events due to the pattern of socio-cultural changes by the process of modernization and simultaneously urbanization. In our context it should be sociologically investigated. This study has been an attempt to identify the causes of divorce, which provides sociological insight to further researcher. Single causal factor is not responsible for dissolution of marriage. Different natures of

dissatisfactions between the spouses are affecting due to the personal, familial, social and economic condition or structure. Therefore, it should be treated under the multidimensional approach basically in the reference to contemporary changing socio-cultural pattern.

Divorce was such a problem that breeds many other social, economic and cultural constraints which compel the divorced women to lead a traumatic life behind the screen of society. Due to divorcee status children also become deprived of the parental affection. Substantially that influences their socialization process negatively. Due to divorce the divorced women pay a lion share of the social costs of consequences from their familial to social life. She loses her status and has to depend on semi skilled or unskilled work for survival. The natures of causes are differing from men to women. Divorce is not only the end of marital relations between the spouses rather it has caused serious problems on their children and adjustment problems themselves in the community. There are different divorce cases, which are not found in the court record in visible form due to social, cultural and economic constraints. Therefore it is essential to examine and analyze customary divorce practices, which found in each and every community.

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