



Original Research

Impact of Divorce on Women's Lives and SDGs: Bangladesh Context

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ABSTRACT

Marriage is essential for a harmonious personal existence, but, in the absence of appropriate intervention, it may result in dire outcomes such as suicide, homicide, mental disorders, and physical illnesses. Women encounter several problems from the onset of marital strife that persist even post-separation, resulting in a predominance of adverse repercussions in their lives over beneficial ones. This study seeks to ascertain the accountability of divorce, assess its beneficial and detrimental impacts on women's lives, and analyse its implications for the attainment of sustainable development goals. The study employed a qualitative technique in the Noakhali District of Chittagong Division, with a sample of seven female participants. The research indicated that severe sadness resulted in dissociation, with the roles of husband and mother-in-law being distinct in all separations. Legal processes were employed to conclude divorces; yet, several participants did not obtain the dower, resulting in substantial adverse repercussions. Separation has little benefit; nonetheless, its principal repercussions include psychological, familial, social, and economic detriment, obstructing the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

1. Introduction

The marriage in Bangladesh constitutes a profound lifelong commitment that embodies spiritual importance and sustains familial and communal ties. The increasing divorce rate in the country raises concerns stemming from economic, social, and cultural aspects. Historically, women had discontented lives owing to reliance on their spouses, diminished social status, and the responsibilities associated with adult offspring (Akhter, 2021; BBC News, 2023). Over time, they progressively acquired control over their domestic matters. Currently, the empowerment of women has resulted in several work-related expectations, including familial responsibilities, childrearing, and financial commitments from jobs or businesses, which can overwhelm them, potentially resulting in marriage, divorce, and familial discord. Marital discord, contention, and bias are additional factors contributing to divorce (BBS, 2014; Sunny et al., 2023).

Divorce is a sociological issue that entails the legal dissolution of a marriage and the separation of spouses. Notwithstanding the adverse societal perceptions encountered by discontented partners,

some couples sustain their unhappy marriage by deriving comfort from their child's visage. The effects of parental separation on a kid are temporary, with emotional distress and fatigue ultimately overcoming the difficulties. In recent decades, a notable transformation in the economic empowerment of women in Bangladesh has occurred (**Chakma et al., 2022; Stirrat, 2004**). The constitution of Bangladesh has affirmed the equal rights of both genders regarding employment, leading to a consistent increase in the participation of women in the workforce across many industries and professions. Nonetheless, the subject of divorce has evolved into a complex issue due to the impact of Western lifestyles on Eastern societies in the context of globalisation. In Bangladesh, spouses prioritise their children's welfare and adhere to cultural standards over personal gratification (**Paik & Chakraborty, 2003**). Women in Bangladesh attain higher educational levels and have increased financial independence; nonetheless, females do not often begin divorce proceedings. Wives are more frequently the initiators of divorces, mostly owing to their husbands' infidelities. As of June 2019, the divorce rate has increased by 17% relative to the preceding year, signifying escalating apprehension about the future of marriage and family in Bangladesh (**World Bank, 2013; Giles, 2018**). The Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs in Bangladesh has raised concerns on the rising incidence of divorce, noting a 30% rise in divorce rates over the past five months compared to the previous year. In Dhaka metropolis, the urban environment is seeing a notable occurrence where the weight of household and child-rearing responsibilities on women has led to a divorce every 40 minutes. Over the next 10-15 years, there is a predicted increase in the population of adults over fifty who are single. The economic crisis and the emotional and social strain induced by the Corona epidemic are contributing to a rise in divorces stemming from disagreements (**Khanam, 2017; Ifty et al., 2024**). Experts have raised concerns that, although women are predominant in divorce rates within the city, this may not accurately represent the national context. People from lower castes do not routinely record weddings and divorces. Nevertheless, in the lowest socioeconomic tiers, couples initiate a higher frequency of divorces. The primary factor contributing to the rise in divorce rates in Bangladesh during the 21st century is the desire to enhance the social and economic standing of married women. The participation of women in the workforce and their financial independence in Bangladesh has increased since the nation's independence. Research indicates that the empowerment of women in Bangladesh is believed to correlate with a rise in the divorce rate (**Islam et al., 2023; Hassan et al., 2024**).

In Bangladesh, grounds for divorce encompass a decline in moral standards, deterioration of values, heightened psychological stress for both genders, and an escalating difficulty in sustaining mutual respect, love, and trust within marital partnerships. Factors contributing to divorce in Bangladesh encompass conflicts between spouses and their in-laws, the allocation of domestic duties and familial obligations, physical and emotional maltreatment of the wife by both the husband and in-laws, poverty, illiteracy, the wife's dependence on the husband for financial sustenance, the custom of dowry demands, polygamy, early marriage, infertility, and a perceived deficiency in physical attractiveness between the spouses (**Begum et al., 2023a; Oliveira, 2024**).

Divorce is a multifaceted issue that may exert considerable psychological, social, and economic effects on women's lives. Factors contributing to divorce encompass inadequate communication, infidelity, abuse, physical intimacy, and sexual dysfunction. Additional factors encompass communication deficiencies, weak conflict resolution abilities, romantic obsession, insufficient marital commitment, financial hardships, alcohol use, immaturity, and physical violence. The number of divorces among women in Bangladesh is rising (**Moniruzzaman et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2024**). This is because of mental and physical abuse caused by dowry demands, drug addiction, lack of trust, extramarital affairs, long separations due to working abroad, watching too much Indian TV, becoming addicted to Facebook, impotence, falling social and moral values, changes in family dynamics, not enough family involvement, not understanding religious customs and taboos, huge dowry expectations, hiding information, marriages between younger women and older men, not getting women's consent before marriage, higher education, and becoming financially independent. Women predominate in this aspect, as they initiate 70% of divorces (**Tamborini et al., 2015; Mithun et al., 2024**). Research indicates that divorced women may enhance their financial status by remaining married while preserving their marriage experience. Even in very tumultuous relationships, individuals can still get beneficial outcomes. Numerous research studies indicate that divorce can have beneficial consequences for the general well-being of many individuals. A significant number of women have enhanced their overall happiness and contentment following divorce. Separation provides individuals with safeguarding against maltreatment, peril, hardship, bodily harm, psychological distress, or intense anguish (**Sunny et al., 2020; Own Reporter, 2022**). Divorce expands the range of employment opportunities available to women, although the long-term effects on women's incomes have lessened in recent years. In the employment position of Palestinian women, divorce can enhance their general well-being by liberating them from domestic abuse and facilitating personal growth. Following the dissolution of their marriage, several divorced women undergo a significant transformation, emerging as bold and exuberant, which frequently yields beneficial outcomes in their lives. Divorce is a multifaceted issue that exerts significant social, economic, and cultural repercussions on women, especially in Bangladesh (**Gustavson et al., 2012; Akter, 2021**).

This systemic problem exacerbates marginalisation and induces individual misery. Divorce disproportionately impacts women in Bangladesh due to patriarchal familial and cultural structures. They undergo a decline in self-esteem, resulting in a markedly stressful existence. The stigma associated with divorce intensifies societal problems and leads to personal anguish. Psychology significantly influences the psychological well-being of individuals, especially women. Studies associate divorce with an increased probability of encountering adverse mental and physical health outcomes. Social and economic factors might lead women to endure trauma or significant mental pain after a divorce. The disintegration of a family acts as a catalyst for a detrimental mentality and a decline in self-confidence, concurrently inducing insecurity (**DFID, 2000; Bibi, 2023; Begum et al., 2023b**). The dissolution of a family results in heightened depression, psychological changes, reduced quality of life, persistent economic difficulties, and

restricted access to reliable emotional support. Divorce is regarded as one of the most agonising life experiences; it intensifies feelings of melancholy and worry, reduces physical vitality and work efficiency, and causes discomfort, embarrassment, despair, restlessness, and a loss of pleasure. Women in Bangladesh frequently endure psychological discomfort marked by emotional shock, tension, anxiety, and a feeling of helplessness (**Rathi & Pachauri, 2018; Rezaul, 2019**). Divorce constitutes a substantial source of stress in individuals' lives, profoundly impairing both personal and familial mental and physical well-being. Women are more vulnerable to emotional and physical impacts than males, and they may have restricted options for managing daily difficulties. The psychological effects of divorce are defined by six principal emotional reactions: anxiety, despair, fear, anger, guilt, and sorrow. Divorce profoundly affects society, especially women, notably in Bangladesh. Cultural traditions frequently stigmatise post-divorce relationships, resulting in loneliness and social estrangement among divorced Iranian women. Divorce frequently undermines a woman's status, social standing, and her family's prestige (**Sharma, 2011; Begum et al., 2022**).

After the dissolution of their marriage, individuals often return to their parental residence, facing financial hardships if their parents are destitute or deceased. Socio-economic and cultural factors impact divorce in Bangladesh, resulting in several social difficulties, including family conflict, child trafficking, child labour, juvenile delinquency, school dropouts, child marriage, drug addiction, prostitution, and the vulnerability of women and children. Women initiating divorce encounter contempt from their families and children, who view them as an additional encumbrance (**Akhter, 2023; Sultana, 2023; Sazzad et al., 2024**). Divorce can impose several economic constraints, particularly affecting women, who are the most economically disadvantaged group in society. Divorced persons frequently encounter financial challenges, resulting in a notable decline in homeownership rates. They also confront poverty, which is crucial for their welfare. Women experience disparities in employment and economic prosperity compared to males, with their financial circumstances significantly impacted by divorce. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) seeks to enhance health and well-being for all age demographics, achieve gender equality, and foster inclusive and cohesive communities, guaranteeing universal access to legal remedies (**Qamar & Faizan, 2021; Malik et al., 2024**). Family development organisations have a unique role in meeting the social needs of divorced women and distinguishing them from other functions. Psychotherapy programs, including cognitive behavioural therapy and supportive therapy, are advantageous for divorced women since they improve relational skills, elevate self-esteem, and offer helpful techniques for addressing marital disputes. Consequently, it is essential to integrate women into relevant efforts (**Andrew & Segun, 2019**).

2. Research Methodology

2.1: Research Techniques and Study Location

This study used a qualitative research design to investigate a particular research subject. We

conducted the study in the Noakhali District of the Chittagong Division, Bangladesh, due to its relevance to the target population and research objectives (**Stanton et al., 1998**).

2.2: Sampling Technique

We used a purposive and snowball sampling approach, both non-probability methods, to select participants from the entire population of divorced persons. The final sample comprised 12 people, with data from seven individuals informing the study's conclusions. We used this sampling technique to ensure access to individuals with relevant experiences and to facilitate recruitment through participant recommendations (**Teachman & Paasch, 1994**).

2.3: Techniques of Data Collection

This research employed both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data was collected using surveys, structured questionnaires, and comprehensive interviews with both closed- and open-ended questions. These methodologies yielded comprehensive insights into participants' experiences, viewpoints, and social situations. Secondary data collected from pertinent literature, including newspapers, internet articles, peer-reviewed journal publications, and other reputable sources, was examined to substantiate and contextualise the primary findings (**Smock et al., 1999**).

2.4: Data Analysis

A rigorous thematic analysis was performed to guarantee the reliability and validity of the gathered data. The main data were meticulously analysed, coded, and categorised to discern patterns and salient themes according to the study goals (**Bhaumik & Saha, 1994; Chowdhury, 2019**). Moreover, secondary data sources were meticulously evaluated to enhance the primary findings and offer a more comprehensive analytical viewpoint. This methodological technique enabled a thorough and detailed investigation of the study topic, guaranteeing reliable and credible outcomes (**Scoones, 1998; Buscho, 2022**).

3. Results and Discussion:

3.1 Responsible for divorce and the process:

The survey included women aged 26 to 40 from Bangladesh residing in communal households' post-marriage. Individuals reliant on other women saw considerable discord in their relationships. Individuals not reliant on other women generally encountered marital discord (**Sunny et al., 2017; Taghavi et al., 2020**). The primary causes leading to divorce were tyranny from husbands and mothers-in-law, psychological distress, physical violence, humiliation, insults, slander, suspicion, and a deficiency of confidence. The principal factors leading to divorce encompass husbands'

inadequate affection for their wives, neglect of responsibilities towards their wives and children, absence of trust in their wives, deference to maternal opinions, physical abuse, psychological torment, maltreatment by mothers-in-law, and reticence during divorce proceedings. The Muslim Marriage and Divorce Registration Act of 1974 mandates that all Bangladeshi Muslim citizens register their marriages, rendering verbal divorce legally ineffective (**Anderson, 2014; Alanazi et al., 2024**).

The study comprised individuals from several areas in Bangladesh, all of whom were Muslim and had attained formal education from high school to graduation (**Ullah, 2020; Kuddus et al., 2021**). All participants were divorced, and some subsequently entered new marriages. The majority cohabited with their wives for over 3 to 5 years, with most having children. In the rural social structure of Bangladesh, infertility is grounds for divorce when women fail to conceive. Nonetheless, none of the research participants experienced divorce as a result of this aspect. All participants were unemployed before the divorce, and only a limited percentage of individuals secured jobs post-divorce (**Waseem et al., 2020; Hassan, 2023**). The principal factors leading to divorce encompass husbands' inadequate affection for their wives, failure to take responsibility for their wives and children, absence of trust in their wives, deference to maternal opinions, physical abuse towards their wives, psychological torment, maltreatment by mothers-in-law, and reticence during divorce proceedings.

3.2 The Causes and Effects of Divorce in Women's Lives:

The scenario study emphasises the adverse effects of divorce in Bangladesh, mostly attributable to the wife's family's economic deprivation, unemployment, and derogatory treatment towards her. Concerns encompass physical violence, adultery, and diminished confidence in the woman. There are also doubts over the woman's associations with men and women (**Hossain & Sujan, 2018**). Research also notes instances of failure to repatriate from overseas and insufficient education among both spouses. Research indicates a substantial reduction in ethical principles among the people in Bangladesh, resulting in a deterioration in ethical standards. The research indicates that the decline of ethical values is the primary cause of divorce, resulting in more adverse effects than beneficial results (**Sunny et al., 2021; Alam et al., 2023**).

3.3 Positive Effects:

A portion of the individuals experienced marital conflict from the outset, whereas a significant number encountered it at a later stage. The bodily torment and emotional anguish caused by the prolonged duration of the fight resulted in the manifestation of disease, sadness, and despair. Individuals who experienced physical abuse were exempt from the group of participants. The two individuals expressed that they are in a favourable state, expressing gratitude to Allah, after being apart for a duration of 5 and 15 years. A recipient of a modest dowry reported using the funds to

acquire a little two-bedroom dwelling within his father's residence. He lives there with his aging mother and physically challenged sister. Following their divorce, about 2-3 years later, four women are earning a little income by working in jobs that align with their skills in order to sustain themselves (**Sunny et al., 2017**). Thus, he was able to ensure both his own and the infant's survival. Family members or relatives motivate other individuals, despite their lack of income.

3.4 Adverse consequences:

The study participants indicated substantial adverse effects on their emotional, social, and economic well-being about 2–3 years after divorce. The consequences were notably severe, manifesting psychologically as indecisiveness, existential anxiety, sleeplessness, appetite loss, gastrointestinal disturbances, physical debilitation, anhedonia, and social withdrawal. Even after establishing a new marriage, some individuals continue to grapple with the enduring emotional repercussions of divorce (**Khaleque, 2011; Islam et al., 2018a**). The reprehensible conduct of community members substantially exacerbates psychological concerns in divorcees. Familial, cultural, and economic factors adversely impact mental health. Marriage reduces the father's responsibilities towards his daughter, resulting in substantial costs for the wedding and compliance with the husband's domestic traditions. Upon returning to their father's family, the participants regarded themselves and their kid as additional burdens. Certain family members opposed their divorce, resulting in a schism between them and their family, especially their mother (**Coleman, 1988; Rahman et al., 2013**). They saw unmarried and jobless persons as financial liabilities to their father's home, excluding others. Certain individuals faced intense reproach from their paternal family.

3.5 Impact on society:

Participants expressed that our culture does not view divorce as a common occurrence. A significant number of individuals lack comprehension of this fact: there are no alternative means of ensuring survival. Society members hold the belief that girls are solely responsible for all vices. Based on this perception, husbands may choose to divorce their wives, or vice versa. Individuals throughout society must endure numerous forms of insult, which ultimately diminish their stature. All five individuals asserted that societal factors hinder second marriages, resulting in a scarcity of favourable marriage offers. Indeed, the community members burden the boy's gathering with falsehoods. A significant number of people in society have expressed the opinion that those who initiated their own divorce (which consisted of four individuals) should have refrained from doing so, even if they were not at fault, and instead should have exhibited greater tolerance (**Rathi & Pachauri, 2018; Rezaul, 2019**). The divorcee finds it challenging to tolerate society's reprehensible conduct.

3.6 Economic impact:

Every participant unanimously acknowledged that marriage and divorce have a significant financial impact on both families and individuals. The father's family bears the financial burdens associated with marriage and divorce. The majority reported not receiving enough money, lacking income, and being unable to sustain themselves without satisfying essential necessities. Three individuals possessed a small amount of currency, but the remaining individuals lacked any form of monetary resources. The initial two to three years following the divorce had a predominantly adverse effect on all those involved. Two individuals expressed that they continue to have a sense of finality and despair in their lives following their divorce (**Paik & Chakraborty, 2003; Pandit et al., 2015**). However, at difficult times, everyone, save for one individual, received some emotional and financial assistance from the father's family and relatives, although the help was limited. Individuals who engage in menial occupations or part-time employment for a period of 2-3 years are sustaining their own lives as well as the lives of their children via their own methods. Unmarried individuals without children are now sustaining their lives with the emotional and financial assistance provided by their paternal family and relatives. The offspring of a marital union are currently under the care and supervision of their grandparents and uncles. The girl is currently taking the SSC test (**Hwang & Lee, 2012; Ifty et al., 2023**).

3.7 Conquer negative emotions:

According to all participants' feedback, family and relatives may offer emotional support to help individuals cope with unpleasant emotions during this period. This assistance involves acknowledging that the situation is an unfortunate event that has occurred to the individual or to many others, and emphasizing that it is not a significant problem. You need to make progress, nurture the child, and avoid disintegration, among other things. Family members can minimize the negative impact by perceiving it as normal, refraining from causing difficulties, avoiding considering it a burden, providing opportunities for education or employment, or facilitating remarriage (**Pew, 2021; Kuddus et al., 2022**). One might mitigate the adverse consequences by receiving financial assistance from family members and relatives to cover personal and child-related expenditures. In addition, if the members of the community refrain from discussing the matter, even without engaging in the dissemination of rumours, the adverse consequences will be mitigated. When is divorce deemed extremely necessary in women's lives? All the participants agreed that minor issues within the family should not lead to divorce. Firstly, it should attempt to find a solution. Attempt to resolve the issues that emerge. If the issue persists despite numerous attempts to fix it, the prevailing consensus is that 'divorce is obligatory' (**Ashakin, Hossain, & Ifty, 2024**). Nearly all participants agree that termination of the relationship is necessary in the following circumstances: when the husband neglects his familial responsibilities, when there is a lack of harmony within the family, and when the husband expresses disinterest in starting a family. The husband and his family subject the wife to mental and physical abuse, causing conflict. The wife mistrusts her husband and believes the statements of her mistreated mother and brothers

(Qamar & Faizan, 2021; Sunny et al., 2023). Additionally, the husband does not have a biological tie to the wife. He went overseas and has not returned. One of the parties declined to agree to a divorce. The belief that marriage is a singular, irreplaceable event that happens only once in a person's lifetime led to this decision (Patoari, 2020; Sazzad et al., 2023).

3.8 Impact of Divorce on Achieving SDGs Goals:

SDG 3: Mental illness occurring before and after divorce had a less beneficial and a greater detrimental impact on the participants' ability to lead healthy lives and enhance their well-being. Therefore, we can assert that achieving the SDG targets had an adverse effect (Pew, 2021; Kuddus et al., 2022).

SDG 5: The partial and inadequate provision of the dower violated the participants' fundamental rights. The individuals who had undergone divorce experienced financial hardship. Four individuals submitted divorce letters as evidence of women's empowerment. One could argue that there was a positive influence on women's empowerment. However, the impact of meeting the SDG targets was much more detrimental due to the greater financial disparity (Moushumi et al., 2024).

SDG 16: The participant's divorce, the inability to establish peaceful and inclusive communities, and the lack of access to justice had a detrimental effect. The participants' divorce had minimal positive effects on their life arrangements but had a significant negative influence. Thus, we can assert that divorce has predominantly exerted a detrimental rather than a beneficial influence on the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (Sunny et al., 2019)

4. Conclusion

Respondents need a minimum of two to three years to successfully address post-separation problems. For many individuals, doing this was not feasible, even after a span of fifteen years. The study revealed that the participants' separations were primarily due to physical coercion and the influence of the husband and mother-in-law. The parents exerted great effort to prevent their separation. Due to its significant negative effects, divorce is detrimental to the well-being of individuals, families, society, and the state. Because divorce has significant adverse effects on individuals, it also hinders the attainment of SDG targets. A limited sample size of 12 divorced women, each from a different town, participated in the study. Given the current high divorce rates, we may conduct an extensive study on a wide scale, encompassing both rural and urban areas. Investigations may also be conducted to explore ways to mitigate it. Researchers can investigate how its negative impacts spread to others. We can further investigate ways to enhance the positive effects of divorce.

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Author Contribution

Author took involved in the creation of the study design, data analysis, fieldwork, and execution stages. Every writer gave their consent after seeing the final work.

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A statement of conflicting interests

The authors declare that none of the work reported in this study could have been impacted by any known competing financial interests or personal relationships.

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