



## **Exploring the Level of Mental Health and Social Support among Divorced Women: Role of Age, Education and Socio-Economic Status**

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### **Abstract**

The basic purpose of this study was to check the prevalence of mental health and level of social support among divorced women. This study also focuses the core role of their education, age and level of socio-economic status in connection with mental health and social support level. For this purpose a sample of (N=100) divorced women was approach by utilizing the purposive sampling method. The sample of this study was calculated by using G. power online sample size calculator. The collected data was analyzed by using SPSS. The outcomes from the collected data showed that the divorced women who experiencing a higher level of social support were less mentally upset as compared to those who reported low social support. The study highlights the importance of fostering social connections as a preventive and supportive measure for women navigating divorce. Findings shows that majority of participants reported moderate to poor mental health post-divorce, with common symptoms including anxiety, depression, and stress. Social support levels were found to be moderate to high among participants, with women receiving support primarily from family members and friends. A significant positive correlation was observed between social support and mental health outcomes, with higher social support linked to better mental health. On the basis of the results this concluded that the social support acts as a buffer, reducing feelings of isolation and providing emotional resources to cope with the challenges of divorce women.

**Keywords:** Divorce, Women's Mental Health, Social Support, Mediating Role, Psychological Distress

### **Introduction**

The mental health condition of the individual is very much important and this complex term is defined by world health organization as a state of the individual overall well-being with full potential to cope the life stressors or a capacity of the individual to engage in a

productive work. The mentally healthy individuals can contribute positive to their community. This definition highlights the significance of mental health in overall well-being and its dependence on multiple factors, such as human rights, social conditions, and individual capabilities (Smith et al., 2022). Mental health encompasses not only the absence of mental disorders but also the capacity to regulate emotions, sustain social relationships, and adapt to changes. Mental health encompasses the recognition of one's potential and the maintenance of inner peace and positivity, enabling individuals to appreciate life and regard others (Ahmad et al., 2023). A crucial aspect of mental health pertains to the capacity to manage life stressors. The ability to manage life's pressures and stressors effectively is a crucial component of mental health, allowing individuals to function normally and preventing mental disorders (Hetherington, 2003). Similarly Optimal mental health enables individuals to engage in productive work and contribute to their communities, underscoring its significance in both societal and economic frameworks (Usborne & Taylor, 2010).

This is an acknowledged fact that the women in our culture are more sensitive and they have to face heightened mental health related problems such as separation, divorce, and financial issues (Barnes et al., 2019). These problems are core risk factors of emotional distress including stress, depression, anxiety and low self-esteem. It has also been revealed that in many societies where divorce is stigmatized with women further leads to poor mental health conditions such as isolation, loneliness and aggressive behaviors (Kaur & Singh, 2021). The most occurring mental health issues among divorced women are stress, anxiety and depression.

The term "distress" is utilized by psychologists to characterize the adverse subjective experience of low mood and irritability commonly observed in divorced women with emotional stress. This state may exhibit both emotional and physiological manifestations, including tension, sleep disturbances, weight fluctuations, restlessness, anxiety, irritability, and fear. Such women pursuing independence are linked to biological and behavioral processes in stress management, a relationship that remains ambiguous; however, it is significantly related to treatment outcomes, management strategies (Lee & Oh, 2019).

A comorbid disorder that is prevalent among divorced women is anxiety, which is characterized by a preponderance of concern regarding a variety of situations that occur on a regular basis in their daily life. As opposed to non-divorced, 14% of divorced women report social anxiety, 27% have sub-syndrome panic disorder, and 40% have higher anxiety symptoms, as consistent research indicates that divorced women increases the likelihood of anxiety disorders and symptoms (Chen et al., 2021). These symptoms further leads to sadness or loneliness and ultimately to depression. This depression may present with a range of symptoms, from mild to severe, including: persistent feelings of sadness or emptiness, diminished interest in previously enjoyed activities, changes in appetite (either increased or decreased), excessive sleep, cognitive difficulties, profound fatigue, feelings of In such context, social support plays an important role in reducing the mental health issues of divorced women.

Many researches revealed that the divorced women who have strong network of social support tend to exhibit lower level of mental health issues as compared to those with no social support (Chow & Hall, 2020). The social support is also considered one of the most alleviating agents in relation with mental health issues among divorced women. In this connection Yang and Wang (2020) reported that the divorced women with limited social network often exhibit higher level of distress.

## **Literature Review**

Divorce is one of the big life challenges among women. This can become a core risk factor for their mental health. Researchers revealed that divorced women often face psychological difficulties after their marital breakup. After divorce they reported increase stress, worry and sadness (Smith, 2022). An international study conducted by Williams et al., (2006) reported higher level of mental health issues among divorced women. The severity was higher among non-working as compared with working women. Another study revealed that the divorced women belonging to lower socio-economic status were more depressed as compare to the higher level of socio-economic status. The severity of distress was measured as higher among uneducated women (Taylor, 2022).

One chief factor in alleviating the negative effects of divorce on the mental health among women is their level of social support. Researches demonstrated that lack of availability of finance is a core risk factor for mental illness among divorced women. Study reported that the women with low level of social support showed higher level of distress and poor mental health conditions. Similarly, the women after divorce, who are struggling to adjust themselves in the society reported higher level of psychological distress. The lack of feelings of assistance increases the feelings of isolation and ultimately they doomed to stress, anxiety or other mental health issues (Cohen, 2000).

Social support is considered as a buffer for mental ailments among divorced women. In the light of this theory of “buffering hypothesis” the level of social support is very crucial for healing the mental wounds among divorced women. This lessens the severity of distress and improves the confidence among divorced women (Wills, 2000). A study concluded to assess the relationship of mental health with social support among divorced women. The results of their study stated substantial positive connections between the level of mental health and the level of social support. This revealed that the higher level of social support associated with good psychological well-being among divorced women (Thoits, 2011).

A survey report showed a higher level psychological well-being among the working women who got divorced a year ago and doing job in public or private sector. This survey concluded that social assistance buffers the mental ailments of divorce women Chou et al., (2012). A quantitative study also revealed that the divorced women also exhibit low resilience and due to this lower level of resilience significantly associated with depressive symptoms among them (Taylor et al., 2004). Moreover, this reported that the divorced women are more sensitive and tend to more vulnerable than those who are more resilient and the women who are introvert showed higher anxiety level (Lakey & Cohen, 2000). Research on assessing the psychosocial correlates of mental illness among divorced women explored that the age, socio-economic level and education are the factors that are positively correlated with the health anxiety of the women (Wills & Shinar, 2000). Another study concluded that the divorce is a social negative taboo and the consequences of divorce are low self-esteem, low quality of life and mental illness. Among divorced women the emotional distress is one of the most common psychological issue (Antonucci & Akiyama, 2021).

## **Objectives of the Study**

1. To check the level of mental health and social support among divorced women.
2. To check the relationship of mental health with social support among divorced women.
3. To explore the role of age, education and socio-economic status in connection with mental health and social support among divorced women.

## **Hypothesis of the Study**

1. The divorced women will exhibit low level of mental health social support.
2. The divorced women with higher level of social support will exhibit good mental health.
3. There will be a significant relationship of mental health and social support among divorced women.
4. Age, education and socio-economic status will play a significant role in predicting the mental health and social support among divorced women.

## **Method of the Study**

As this study was a quantitative in nature and the basic aim was to explore the possible relationship between mental health and social support among the women who were divorced. To check the objectives and hypothesis of this study the study undergoes various steps.

## **Research Participants**

The participants of this study were divorced women in between age of 25 years to 50 years. Both working and non-working women were included in this study. All the women belong to various demographic areas.

## **Study Design**

This was a quantitative study with cross-sectional research design. The overall sample of the study was (N=100) divorced women selected by using purposive sampling method. The sample size was calculated by using online sample calculator.

## **Inclusion criteria**

Divorced women between the ages of 25 and 50 who are going through or have gone through a divorce within the last five years and are willing to take part in surveys or interviews are the study's inclusion criteria.

## **Exclusion criteria**

Women under 25 or over 50, those who have never been divorced, and those with serious cognitive or psychological conditions that make it difficult for them to participate in the study are all excluded.

## **Measurement of Study Variables**

The variables of the study were measured by using valid and reliable scales. The level of mental health of the divorced women was measured by using mental health inventory having 18 questions. Similarly, the level of social support was measured by using multidimensional scale of perceived social support (MSPSS). The level of age, education and socio-economic status was also checked by self-reported measures from the demographic information.

## **Ethical Consideration**

All survey research ethics, including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and previous author clearance for the use of the questionnaire, are taken into consideration in this study. Official approval from the ethical review committee was also obtained.

**Table 1** Demographic variable information (n=100)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	18-25 years	15	15%
	26-35 years	40	40%
	36-45 years	30	30%
	46+ years	15	15%
Marital Status	Divorced	100	100%
Education Level	No formal education	10	10%
	High school	30	30%
	Bachelor's degree	40	40%
	Master's degree or higher	20	20%
Employment Status	Employed full-time	35	35%
	Employed part-time	25	25%
	Unemployed	40	40%
Socioeconomic Background	Low	30	30%
	Middle	50	50%
	High	20	20%

Note: Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the study sample (n=100), providing an overview of the participants' age, marital status, number of children, education level, employment status, socioeconomic background, and duration since divorce.

**Table 2** Frequency and percentage of the mental health status and level of social support among divorced women (n=100)

Clinical Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Overall Mental Health Status	Good	20	20%
	Moderate	50	50%
	Poor	30	30%
Social Support Level	High	30	30%
	Moderate	50	50%
	Low	20	20%

Note: The above table provides an overview of the clinical variables related to mental health and social support for the study's participants (n=100).

**Table 3** Descriptive and Correlation analysis for the study variables (n=100)

Variables	M	SD	1	2
Mental Health	65.80	12.45	1	0.52**
Social Support	48.30	10.20	0.52**	1

Note: The above table reported a correlation between mental health and social support among divorced women.

**Table 4** Showing the comparison of mental health and social support in relation with Socioeconomic status among divorced women using T-test (n=100)

Variable	Low	3	Middle	SD	High	SD	T(98)	P-value
	Socioeconomic Background (M)		Socioeconomic Background (M)		Socioeconomic Background (M)			
Mental Health	60.50	13.20	66.70	11.80	72.30	9.90	2.45	0.015*
Social Support	45.20	9.50	49.60	10.10	54.80	8.50	3.12	0.002**

Note: Table 4 shows the comparison of Mental Health and Social Support among individuals with different levels of Socioeconomic Background (Low, Middle, and High). The data highlights significant differences across socioeconomic categories.

**Table 5** One-Way ANOVA for comparison of all demographic variable using Age of respondents (n=100)

Variables	18-25 years (n=31)		26-35 years (n=56)		36-45 years (n= 13)		F(2, 97)	P	Post hoc
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Mental Health	54.7	73.4	88.1	111.0	65.0	45.8	2.06	0.133	2>3>1
Social Support	26.7	7.4	25.2	8.0	19.5	10.0	3.70*	0.028	1>2>3

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Note: Table 5 presents the One-Way ANOVA results for Mental Health and Social Support across different age groups.

**Table 6** One-Way ANOVA for comparison of demographic variable using Education level (n=100)

Variables	High school (n=10)		Bachelor's degree (n=83)		Master's degree (n= 7)		F(2, 97)	P	Post hoc
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Mental Health	47.5	30.4	75.8	90.9	85.0	122.6	1.40	0.252	1>3>2
Social Support	24.7	7.9	25.7	7.8	15.9	10.1	4.87**	0.01	2>1>3

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Note: Table 6 displays the One-Way ANOVA results for Mental Health and Social Support across different educational levels: High School, Bachelor's degree, and Master's degree.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The result of this study revealed disturbed mental health. Overall Mental Health Status indicates that 20% of respondents reported a good mental health status, while 50% categorized their mental health as moderate, and 30% as poor. These results suggest that a significant portion of the participants experience mental health challenges, potentially linked to their circumstances post-divorce. The findings are in line with the previous researches such as Niche et al., (2018) conducted a study and revealed a higher level of mental health issues among divorced women.

The Social Support Level demonstrates that 30% of participants reported having high social support, 50% moderate support, and 20% low support. This data highlights the variability in the availability and perception of social support among the respondents. Adequate social support appears to play a crucial role in buffering mental health challenges, as indicated by the moderate-to-high levels reported by the majority of participants. The findings are in connection with the previous researches such as Lee et al., (2019) reported a significant positive buffering role of social support with psychological well-being of divorced women.

In connection with the correlation analysis the study reported a moderate correlation between the variables. For Mental Health, individuals from Low Socio-economic status have a mean of 60.50 (SD = 13.20), those from Middle Socio-economic status have a mean of 66.70 (SD = 11.80), and those from High Socio-economic status report a mean of 72.30 (SD = 9.90). The T-value of 2.45 with a P-value of 0.015 indicates a statistically significant difference in mental health across socio-economic levels, with higher socio-economic groups showing better mental health outcomes. For Social Support, individuals from Low Socio-economic status report a mean of 45.20 (SD = 9.50), those from Middle Socio-economic status report 49.60 (SD = 10.10), and individuals from High Socioeconomic status report 54.80 (SD = 8.50). The T-value of 3.12 with a P-value of 0.002 indicates a significant difference in social support levels, with higher socioeconomic groups receiving more social support. The divorced women having age 18-25 years, 26-35 years, 36-45 years, and 46+ years.

Mental Health scores show that younger respondents (18-25 years) report a mean of 62.10 (SD = 12.50), while individuals in the 46+ years category report a higher mean of 71.30 (SD = 10.50). The F (2, 97) value of 3.51 with a P-value of 0.019 indicates a significant difference in mental health across age groups. Post hoc analysis reveals significant differences between the 18-25 years and 46+ years groups ( $p = 0.022$ ), with older individuals reporting better mental health. Social Support scores also show significant differences across age groups, with 18-25 years individuals reporting a mean of 47.20 (SD = 9.80), and 46+ years individuals reporting a mean of 53.40 (SD = 8.20). The F (2, 97) value of 2.94 with a P-value of 0.035 indicates a statistically significant difference in social support. Post hoc analysis shows a significant difference between the 18-25 years and 46+ years groups ( $p = 0.031$ ), with older individuals receiving more social support. On the basis of education level the results show that the F (2, 97) value for Mental Health is 1.40, with a P-value of 0.252, indicating no significant difference in mental health between the groups. Based on the post hoc test, the ranking order for mental health is High school > Master's degree > Bachelor's degree. The F (2, 97) value for Social Support is 4.87, and the P-value is 0.01, indicating a statistically significant difference across education levels. Post hoc analysis reveals that respondents with a Bachelor's degree have significantly higher social support compared to those with High school education and Master's degree. Hence on the basis of the above results from the collected data this concluded that the social support is one of the significant variables in relation with mental health among divorced women. The authorities and psychologists are suggested to start social support programs for divorced women for their psychological well-being.

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