

## Original Research

# Exploring the Socioeconomic and Emotional Effects of Divorce on Women in Savar: A Cross-Sectional Study

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### Abstract

#### Background

Divorce is an increasingly visible phenomenon in both urban and rural parts of Bangladesh, yet its consequences especially on women remain understudied. In a society deeply rooted in patriarchy, divorced women often face not only emotional turmoil but also significant socioeconomic setbacks. Understanding these multidimensional impacts is essential to shaping supportive policy and community frameworks.

#### Objective

This study aimed to explore the socioeconomic and emotional consequences of divorce on women in the Savar region. It specifically focused on identifying the key challenges faced by divorced women in terms of employment, living arrangements, mental health, social stigma, and childcare responsibilities.

#### Method

A cross-sectional mixed-methods design was employed, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews. Data were collected from 384 divorced women in the Savar area using structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Stratified purposive sampling was used to ensure diversity in age, education, and socioeconomic background. The data were processed using SPSS 27 and Microsoft Excel, with both descriptive and interpretive analysis applied.

#### Results

Findings revealed that a majority of respondents were young (20–29 years), had secondary-level education, and relied heavily on natal families or in-laws for post-divorce housing. Nearly half were employed, while a significant number remained housewives or engaged in low-paying jobs. Causes of divorce included family conflict, extramarital affairs, and lack of understanding. Emotional effects were profound, with over 85% reporting mental or social harassment. Children of divorced women were also significantly impacted, with reported difficulties in school performance, behavior, and legal documentation. Financial support primarily came from family (58.3%) and NGOs (16.7%).

#### Conclusion

Divorce imposes layered and long-lasting effects on women's lives in Savar, affecting not only their financial independence but also their emotional stability and social standing. The study highlights the urgent need for integrated support systems including legal aid, mental health services, and economic empowerment initiatives targeted specifically at divorced women. Future research should further explore longitudinal outcomes and intervention strategies to mitigate post-divorce vulnerabilities.

### Highlights/Key Point of Article

- After divorce, many women in Savar face money problems, stress, and social shame.
- Most have to move back with parents or in-laws because they can't afford their own home.
- Many are treated unfairly, and children often struggle in school and daily life.

**Keywords**— Divorce, Emotional Well-being, Women's lives, Marriage dissolution, Psychological Effects, Socioeconomic factors

## 1. Introduction

Divorce has increasingly become a subject of academic, policy, and public concern worldwide, reflecting evolving

cultural norms, shifting gender roles, and broader socioeconomic transformations. While it may provide liberation from dysfunctional or oppressive marriages, divorce often introduces complex challenges, particularly for women.

These challenges are compounded in patriarchal societies like Bangladesh, where entrenched socio-cultural traditions and gender inequalities continue to influence women's lives [1], [2].

Although divorce rates in Bangladesh remain lower compared to global averages, recent statistics suggest a rising trend, especially in urban areas [3]. Factors contributing to this increase include women improved educational attainment, greater economic participation, enhanced awareness of rights, and reduced tolerance for domestic violence [4]. Despite these positive developments, women disproportionately bear the adverse consequences of divorce due to societal biases, discriminatory family structures, and inadequate institutional safeguards.

One of the most immediate effects of divorce is the economic vulnerability women face. In developed contexts, research indicates a sharp decline in women's income after divorce. For example, Smock et al. reported that divorced women in the United States experienced a 30% reduction in household income compared to married counterparts [5]. In Bangladesh, where women's labor force participation is relatively low, the consequences are even more severe. Jesmin and Salway found that many divorced women were compelled to return to parental homes or accept insecure, low-paying informal employment, perpetuating economic dependency [6]. Barriers to property ownership, inheritance, and alimony further restrict financial stability, deepening women's socioeconomic marginalization [7].

The emotional consequences of divorce are equally profound. Hetherington highlighted the long-term psychological trauma associated with marital dissolution, particularly in societies with entrenched stigma [8]. In Bangladesh, Ahmed and Sultana reported that divorced women frequently experienced depression, anxiety, and in severe cases, suicidal ideation [9]. Social stigma exacerbates these issues, as divorced women are often portrayed as morally deviant or blamed for marital breakdown. Sultana documented that many urban divorced women encountered discrimination in housing, employment, and community life, which limited opportunities for remarriage and social reintegration [10].

Custody and childcare present additional challenges. Rahman et al. observed that women in Bangladesh often faced legal and procedural obstacles in securing child custody or financial support, particularly when lacking the economic resources to pursue lengthy court battles [11]. Such legal disempowerment reflects the broader systemic inequities embedded in family law and societal structures.

Education has emerged as a protective factor in mitigating post-divorce hardships. Poortman demonstrated that higher education correlates with better employment outcomes and improved mental health for divorced women [12]. Similarly, Kabir et al. found that Bangladeshi women with secondary or higher education were more likely to secure re-employment or entrepreneurial opportunities, thereby reducing dependence on extended family networks [13]. This highlights education's role in strengthening resilience and fostering autonomy.

Geographic disparities further shape women's post-divorce experiences. While urban women often benefit from better access to legal aid, employment, and mental health services, rural women face heightened economic dependency and social isolation due to conservative community norms and limited institutional support [6]. Despite these adversities, many women develop coping strategies. Gadalla emphasized the role of NGOs, peer support groups, and counseling services in facilitating emotional recovery and reintegration [14]. In Bangladesh, grassroots women's organizations have proven particularly effective in helping women regain confidence and reintegrate into social and economic life.

The effects of divorce are not uniform but vary according to age, education, socioeconomic class, and parental status. Kabir et al. noted that while educated, urban, childless women may successfully rebuild independence, poorer and less educated women with children often face compounded challenges [13]. Such intersectional perspectives are crucial to fully understanding the diverse realities of divorced women in Bangladesh.

Given these complexities, comprehensive research that captures both the socioeconomic and emotional consequences of divorce in the Bangladeshi context remains limited. This study seeks to address this gap by employing a cross-sectional design that integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches. The ultimate objective is to generate evidence-based insights that inform policy reforms, strengthen legal protections, and expand community-based support systems. By doing so, the research aims to empower divorced women and promote their inclusion in a rapidly transforming Bangladeshi society.

## 2. Objective

To explore and analyze the socioeconomic and emotional effects of divorce on women in order to understand how divorce influences their living conditions, well-being, and social status in a cross-sectional context.

- To understand the demographic and socioeconomic profile of divorced women, including their age, education, employment status, living conditions, and financial support.
- To assess the effects of divorce on family dynamics, focusing on child custody, emotional and social impacts on children, and the role of caregivers.
- To explore the emotional, psychological, and social consequences of divorce on women, including experiences of harassment, support received, and their coping and reintegration into society.

## 3. Methodology

This cross-sectional study, *Exploring the Socioeconomic and Emotional Effects of Divorce on Women: A Cross-Sectional Study*, employed a mixed-methods approach to examine the impact of divorce on women in Savar, Bangladesh. Quantitative data were collected through structured surveys to capture measurable patterns, while qualitative data from in-

depth interviews and focus group discussions provided deeper insights into emotional, social, and economic dimensions. The study targeted divorced women residing in Savar, with participants recruited via community centers, local organizations, and social media platforms. A combination of stratified and purposive sampling was used to ensure diversity in age, socioeconomic status, and education, with the sample size determined using the formula  $n = [z^2 * p(1-p)] / e^2$  at a 95% confidence interval, yielding 384 respondents. Primary data were drawn from surveys and interviews, while secondary sources included relevant scholarly articles, books, and official documents. A structured and pre-tested questionnaire guided data collection, and case study methods were incorporated to capture individual narratives. Quantitative data were processed using Microsoft Excel and analyzed with SPSS version 27, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns. Ethical protocols were rigorously followed: participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, risks, and benefits in their local language, and confidentiality was assured, with all information used strictly for academic purposes. By combining methodological rigor with ethical sensitivity, the study sought to generate a comprehensive understanding of the socioeconomic and emotional.

#### 4. Data Analysis

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Categories	N	(%)
<b>Age</b>	≤19 years	27	7.0
	20–29 years	242	63.0
	30–39 years	99	25.8
	40–49 years	16	4.2
<b>Marital Arrangement</b>	Arranged marriage	216	56.3
	Love marriage	111	28.9
	Runaway marriage	27	7.0
	Others	30	7.8
<b>Religion</b>	Muslim	336	87.5
	Buddhist	30	7.8
	Christian	18	4.7

The majority of respondents were young women aged 20–29 years (63%), highlighting early adulthood as the most vulnerable stage for divorce. Over half (56.3%) were from arranged marriages, reflecting cultural norms, and most (87.5%) identified as Muslim, consistent with national demographics.

Table 2: Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Categories	N	(%)
<b>Education</b>	Illiterate	72	18.8
	Secondary	148	38.5
	Higher Secondary	66	17.2

Variable	Categories	N	(%)
<b>Employment</b>	Graduate/Postgraduate	98	25.5
	Job holder	188	49.0
	Housewife	124	32.3
	Housemaid	48	12.5
	Others	24	6.3
<b>Current Residence</b>	Father's home	149	38.8
	Father-in-law's home	81	21.1
	Other arrangements	97	25.3
	Independent	57	14.8

Most women had secondary education (38.5%) and nearly half (49%) were employed, indicating a partial shift toward economic participation. However, reliance on natal families was high, as 38.8% returned to their father's home after divorce, while only 14.8% secured independent housing.

Table 3: Marriage and Divorce-Related Information

Variable	Categories	N	(%)
<b>Duration before Divorce</b>	≤2 years	138	35.9
	3–5 years	118	30.7
	>5 years	128	33.3
<b>Causes of Divorce</b>	Family reasons	115	29.9
	Extramarital affairs	103	26.8
	Physical disability	57	14.8
	Lack of understanding	50	13.0
	Drug addiction	40	10.4
	Pointless	11	2.9
<b>Denmohar Payment</b>	Physical torture	8	2.1
	Paid	344	89.6
	Not Paid	40	10.4

Divorce occurred most frequently within the first two years of marriage (35.9%). Key causes included family disputes (29.9%) and extramarital affairs (26.8%), while abuse and addiction were less frequent but notable factors. A large majority (89.6%) reported payment of denmohar, indicating strong adherence to religious marital obligations.

Table 4: Children and Childcare after Divorce

Variable	Categories	N	(%)
<b>Current Caregiver</b>	Grandfather	118	30.7
	Mother	105	27.3
	Grandmother	32	8.3
	Father	20	5.2
	N/A	109	28.4
<b>Child Maintenance Paid By</b>	Father	123	32.0
	Mother	103	26.8
	Grandfather	49	12.8

Variable	Categories	N	(%)
Perceived Effect on Children	N/A	109	28.4
	Yes	275	71.6
	N/A	109	28.4

Extended family members, particularly grandfathers (30.7%), were the main child caregivers, surpassing mothers (27.3%) and fathers (5.2%). Fathers contributed to 32% of child maintenance, but in 28.4% of cases no financial support was reported. Most respondents (71.6%) acknowledged divorce had adverse effects on children.

Table 5: Social and Emotional Consequences of Divorce

Variable	Categories	N	(%)
Effect on Respondent	Social life	129	33.6
	Personal life	73	19.0
	Other family members	57	14.8
	Workplace	46	12.0
	Others	79	20.6
Types of Torture	Abused by family members	87	22.7
	False accusations/social exclusion	84	21.9
	Abuse from neighbors	69	18.0
	Mental torture	60	15.6
	Village arbitration abuse	28	7.3
	None	56	14.6
Allowance after Divorce	Family	224	58.3
	NGOs	64	16.7
	Relatives	56	14.6
	None	40	10.4

Social exclusion was the most common effect, reported by 33.6% of respondents, while family members were the primary source of post-divorce abuse (22.7%). Financial survival depended heavily on family allowances (58.3%), with minimal institutional support from NGOs (16.7%) and no support for 10.4% of women.

Divorce negatively affects children in multiple ways. Many faces trouble getting along with peers (41.4%), behavior changes (24.5%), and difficulties in school or legal processes such as admission (26.0%) and birth registration (37.2%). This shows how divorce affects kids both emotionally and in daily life from figure 1.

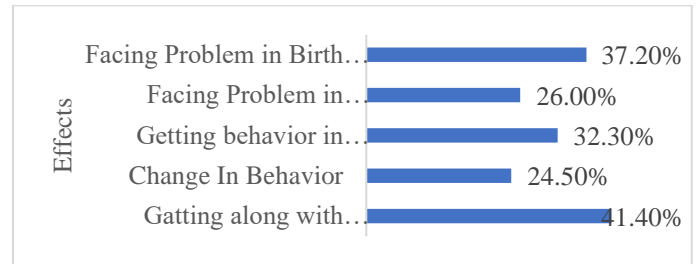


Figure 1: Types of Effect on Children

## 5. Results and Discussion

This study examined the socioeconomic and emotional consequences of divorce on women in Savar, Bangladesh. The findings indicate that divorced women encounter multiple interrelated challenges, including economic insecurity, social stigma, emotional distress, and custodial responsibilities. These outcomes are consistent with patterns documented in prior research both within Bangladesh and globally.

Housing insecurity emerged as a key concern. Only 14.8% of participants were able to establish independent residences, while the majority returned to their paternal households (38.8%) or resided with former in-laws (21.1%). This reliance on natal families mirrors earlier findings that rural Bangladeshi women often depend on extended kinship networks post-divorce due to limited access to assets or affordable housing [15]. Economic vulnerability was also evident: 32.3% of women remained unemployed (housewives) and 12.5% engaged in low-paying domestic work, reinforcing evidence of a sharp post-divorce income decline among women [16].

Although 25.5% of respondents possessed graduate or postgraduate qualifications, education did not guarantee economic independence. While higher education may mitigate post-divorce disadvantages [17], the Savar context demonstrates how cultural norms and limited labor market opportunities constrain such benefits. This observation aligns with prior research noting that educated women in Bangladesh continue to face stigma and employment discrimination following divorce [18].

Childcare responsibilities were disproportionately assumed by mothers and paternal grandparents, with fathers contributing minimally (5.2% as caregivers, 32% as maintenance providers). This finding supports earlier work documenting structural and legal barriers that prevent women from securing custody and adequate child support [19]. Moreover, 70% of participants believed divorce negatively influenced their children's socialization, behavior, and education, consistent with evidence on the psychological toll of marital breakdowns [20].

The emotional costs were substantial. Approximately 33.6% of respondents reported deterioration in social life, 19% cited negative impacts on personal well-being, and over 85% experienced harassment, including mental torture, verbal abuse, and false accusations. These outcomes parallel findings of heightened anxiety and depression among divorced women

in Bangladesh [21] and are consistent with international evidence on the long-term psychological consequences of divorce [22].

Support structures were limited. While 58.3% of participants received some financial assistance from family, only 16.7% accessed NGO support. This highlights the shortcomings of formal welfare programs for divorced women [23]. The lack of institutional aid compels reliance on fragile, conditional family-based networks.

Social stigma emerged as a pervasive issue, with respondents frequently labeled as “immoral” or “characterless.” This mirrors accounts of derogatory stereotyping of divorced women in Bangladesh [24] and illustrates how stigma restricts reintegration, employment, and community participation.

The analysis further shows variation across age, education, and family responsibilities. Older women (40–49) with multiple children experienced compounded hardships, while younger women (20–29) displayed greater adaptability and access to informal employment. This supports calls for intersectional approaches to understanding post-divorce trajectories [18].

Overall, these results both confirm and extend previous findings. While global literature emphasizes economic vulnerability and social exclusion as common consequences of divorce [25], the Bangladeshi context highlights unique dynamics, including entrenched stigma, weak legal protections, and dependence on natal families. These findings underscore the need for context-specific, gender-sensitive policies to address the lived realities of divorced women in Bangladesh.

## 6. Conclusion and Future Scope

This study explored the multifaceted impacts of divorce on women in the Savar area, focusing on their socioeconomic conditions, emotional well-being, and social experiences. The findings reveal that divorce significantly affects women's lives in multiple domains—economically, socially, and psychologically. Many respondents face economic hardship due to limited employment opportunities, inadequate child maintenance, and heavy reliance on family or NGO support. Social stigma remains prevalent, as evidenced by widespread reports of harassment by neighbors, family members, and even through village arbitration. Emotionally, a large portion of women reported distress, anxiety, and a decline in their personal well-being. The effect of divorce also extends to their children, many of whom face behavioral challenges, issues with school admission, and difficulties in obtaining birth registration. Despite some women demonstrating resilience through employment and support networks, the majority remain vulnerable due to systemic inequalities, cultural bias, and lack of institutional support. The study underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions to protect, support, and empower divorced women in Bangladesh, especially in semi-urban regions like Savar.

## Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. To protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, the dataset is not publicly shared.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this study.

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## Authors' Contribution

Sourov Ahmed conceptualized and designed the study, developed the research instruments, and supervised the overall research process. Shuvo Molla was primarily responsible for data collection, statistical analysis, and drafting the initial manuscript. Both authors contributed to the interpretation of findings, critically revised the manuscript for intellectual content, and approved the final version for submission.

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