

Psychological Adjustment among Divorced Women

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Abstract

The A marriage that ends in divorce will have a physical, mental, and social impact on women. Psychological adjustment can be observed through the behavior that the woman manifests after the divorce phase. Women's failure to cope with stress after divorce also affects other family members, especially children. Thus, the objective of the study was to identify psychological adjustment among divorced women in Kuala Terengganu. A total of five respondents were interviewed, women aged 20 to 40 years old, having a divorce period of more than two years and are members of 'Persatuan Kebajikan Ibu-Ibu & Ibu Tunggal Terengganu' (PERKIBUT). The data obtained were analyzed using Nvivo 12 intelligence. The results showed that most of the respondents were able to adapt well due to the existence of a good social support system to survive and maintain harmony in the family. Strategies to improve women's psychological well-being are of particular importance to women's empowerment in terms of response skills and social support systems.

Keywords: Divorce, Divorced Woman, Psychological Adjustment

Introduction

Divorce has led to major changes in life including changes in family structure, economic weakness, the loneliness associated with changes in social networks, and increased role pressures as well as the burden of duty in caring for children and earning a living (Damato, 2019). Divorce can occur for a few reasons including personality factors, sexuality problems, communication factors, third-person intervention, drug abuse, lack of religious upbringing, neglect of responsibility as well as and abandonment of spouse (Shabuddin et al., 2016). Referring to Damota (2019), the most significant causes of divorce issues are communication problems, lack of skills in managing conflicts, loss of love, lack of commitment to financial problems, alcoholism, lack of maturity, and physical abuse.

The stresses of life and the causes of divorce affect the pattern of self-adjustment of women after a divorce. As a result of personal experience and belief systems, women tend to experience higher psychological distress. From a psychological point of view, divorced couples will experience the shock of living alone, emotional disorders, behavioral changes, and thought disorders (Shabuddin et al., 2016). According to Ardi and Maizura (2018), individuals

in divorce situations will feel psychological instability such as sadness, frustration, discomfort, anxiety, unhappiness, anger, self-blame, stress, depression, fear, and anxiety. Shabuddin et al (2016) state that the emotional impact is more experienced by women than men. In addition, Damato (2019) also states that divorced women are often caught up in a cycle of financial problems and stressful life events. In fact, all the stress and burden that women face after a divorce can contribute to a decrease in their psychological well-being and quality of life.

Psychological adaptation is a multidimensional concept that refers to an individual's response to critical life events (Perrig-Chiello et al., 2015). The psychological adaptation of divorced women is considered successful in the event of the formation of positive emotions, social communication, self-openness, or acceptance of divorce and can cope with mental health (Pudrovska & Carr, 2008). A good support system whether psychological, emotional, spiritual, or economic is very helpful for divorced women in the face of stress. In the face of stress and change, there are many different approaches taken in the face of such situations where some women give up, some choose to separate themselves from the stress experienced and some of them are positive and show courage in continuing life (Ramos & Tus, 2020). According to Hashim, Azmawati, and Endut (2015), a good quality of life for women can improve the quality of life of others under her care. However, failure of psychological adaptation in divorced women can lead to a breakdown of the family institute.

Methodology

The design of the study is a qualitative study. The purpose of the qualitative approach is to know in depth about the situation taking place (Creswell, 2012; Gay & Mills, 2015). The study population consists of women registered under 'Persatuan Kebajikan Ibu-Ibu & Ibu Tunggal Terengganu' (PERKIBUT) and a total of five respondents were selected by referring to the criteria set for an interview. Among the criteria are i) the divorce period is more than two years. Generally, depressive and anxiety symptoms that interfere with individual functional patterns occur over several months, and then individuals gradually return to the baseline after two years (Bonanno & Mancini, 2008); ii) being in the early adult age range between 20 to 40 years old when divorced because based on the statistics on marriage and divorce in Malaysia on 2021 reported that the highest divorce was in the age group of 30 to 34 years for both sexes (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). Furthermore, early adulthood is a time of economic independence, personal as well as career development, and intimation (Santröck, 2012). Based on Pudrovska and Carr's studies (2008), propose to expand the range of community-oriented response mechanisms such as community social support in addition to just the individual level in assessing the effectiveness of strategies for psychological adaptation in the short and long term.

The location of the study was in Kuala Terengganu as the district recorded the highest divorce rate in the State of Terengganu each year by referring to the statistics on marriage and divorce in Malaysia in 2021 which recorded 610 out of 2514 divorce cases in the state of Terengganu (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). In this case, the interview question consists of four sections, namely sections A, B, C, and D. Part A consists of eight questions on the background and demographics of the respondent, namely age, race, place of residence, duration of the marriage, divorce period, employment status, number of children and level of education. Part B has one question related to the effects experienced after a divorce and part C is on the psychological adjustment among divorced women. While part D contains three questions about the form of social support received. Researchers have used Nvivo 12 software to analyze data as well as thematic analysis methods used.

Results & Discussion

Kramrei et al (2007) defined divorce adjustment as a process that helps individuals achieve better emotional and psychological well-being after a divorce. The adaptation process that each woman performs is different because the impacts and challenges experienced are also different. Adaptation refers to the steps or methods used to cope with a critical situation after a divorce from a husband. Referring to the results, all respondents showed psychological adjustment well even though it was difficult at the beginning of the divorce. There are several themes that emerge, namely positive thinking, religious appreciation, self-appreciation, and self-isolation.

a. Positive Thinking

Positive thinking refers to the attitude of openness and acceptance of the respondent to divorce. R1 stated that after a few years, he was able to fully accept reality. R2 also does not want to remember the event because it is a black history in life that has been forgotten. Meanwhile, R4 received the divorce well and was always positive in helping her recover faster. In contrast to R5, it is quite difficult to accept such a divorce but neglect the responsibility to the child.

Table 1

Positive Thinking

Respondent	Reference (s)	Interview excerpts
1	1 reference has been encoded (0.19% coverage)	I can move on
2	1 reference was encoded (3.61% coverage)	How uh... I don't remember (laughs) because if you can't think but it's okay... Because sometimes if we recall the bitter experiences of our lives are so painful, we don't want to recall them... but I've risen
4	1 reference has been encoded (1.53% coverage)	I've learned... I've accepted it sincerely. Sometimes when we feel sincere...the sustenance comes pouring in... because we don't think we're alone.
5	1 reference was encoded (1.45% coverage)	At the beginning of the divorce, it's like it's not acceptable. In 2, or 3 months, too. It's like Stress and I lost my way... But I'm still focused on the kids.

Crosier et al (2007) expressed concern and trauma because of the change of wife status to a single mother. However, the survey respondents were more positive in accepting the situation as a single mother and accepted the past as a process of learning and teaching about life. They also choose not to think too much about what happened and continue to rise to build a new life. Kholidah and Alsa (2012) also agree that positive thinking can lower psychological stress.

b. Religious Appreciation

The results showed that respondents used a religious approach to maintain psychological well-being after divorce. Through this approach, the respondent gains strength by drawing closer to God. After going through the divorce phase, R2 spends more time on religious activities to build a new passion for survival. Besides, R4 believes the best place to complain about all the trouble to God. R5 also declares religion as a strong lifeline to face problems well.

Table 2

Religious Appreciation

Respondent	Reference (s)	Interview excerpts
2	1 reference was encoded (1.34% coverage)	I draw closer to God. Then there are people giving advice and encouragement
4	1 reference has been encoded (3.45% coverage)	When you feel bad, you're complaining to God. When we complain to people, people don't understand what we're feeling, what we're going through. The journey of life is different
5	1 reference has been encoded (3.75% coverage)	I strengthen my heart and ask God. Prayer always asks God to encourage me so that. I do it like I'm talking to myself I want to love myself, I don't want to ask why I want to hurt myself, why would I ruin myself because of someone else... ha well I take care of myself, well I love myself especially I need to love myself, I need to be healthy, my emotions need to be healthy...

Koenig (2001) also argues that religiosity has a positive influence in optimizing self-adjustment such as reviving hope, confidence, well-being, and the feeling that life has meaning after the hardships faced. The results of the Muhammad et al (2019) study found that religious appreciation has a significant impact on the adaptation of women because if divorced women accept the situation sincerely and patiently then they can adjust well. They will become confident in survival, have a clear purpose, and be able to plan the direction of a better life. The findings showed that most respondents using religious approaches in adapting after divorce are in line with Nidzam and Adam's (2015) post-divorce Muslim women can face challenges if they deeply appreciate the religious dimension.

c. Self-esteem

Individuals with high self-esteem can form psychological adjustments in a short time. Two respondents, R3 and R5, have good self-esteem and can cope with the divorce phase. R3 stated that she continued to live a more positive life to make a living for herself and her child. R5, on the other hand, loves and values itself more than others. Both respondents also agreed that children are a source of strength to survive after being let down by the ex-husband

Table 3

Self-esteem

Respondent	Reference (s)	Interview excerpts
3	1 reference has been encoded (2.57% coverage)	If we're depressed it's bad for the child. The kid is still young, so we're going through it.
5	1 reference has been encoded (3.29% coverage)	I think back from me to let myself be hurt, it's better for me to take care of my sister, sister's self-love. Why do you want to love him when he does that. You own need to be strong because you want to defend a child, you want to take care of a child... I have four sons. so I persuaded myself

Self-esteem affects the psychological well-being of divorced women. Dayaksini and Hudaniah (2003) argue that the importance of self-esteem in divorced women is that they can evaluate themselves positively to tend to feel happy, healthy, successful, and adaptable.

d. Self-isolation

Staying away is one of the patterns of retraction adjustment. R1 took action to migrate to forget the painful memories. She stayed away to forget about her ex-husband and prevent her ex-husband from disturbing herself and the child. She expressed her ex-husband's desire to refer, but she was discouraged and wanted to find her own happiness and freedom. Therefore, she decided to travel to another state to gain peace and build a new life with the child.

Table 4

Self-Isolation

Respondent	Reference (s)	Interview excerpts
1	1 reference has been encoded (1.86% coverage)	I'm determined to carry myself with my daughter. At that time, she was 6 years old. I work at the Nursery in Semenyih. After that I moved to Sarawak, I worked and stayed with my foster family.

Self-adaptation from the psychological aspect looked at how the study respondents adjusted emotions, feelings, and thoughts in the face of post-divorce challenges. Various patterns and strategies have been used to establish yourself as a positive and strong person for the sake of children.

Conclusion

Post-divorce adjustment is important because it can affect other individuals in its environment including adaptation to emotional changes and feelings, adaptation to living only with one of the parents, adaptation to finding a new partner, adaptation to not violating any of the parties, and adaptation to understand family failures (Hurlock, 1990). In this context, social support helps women to reduce the difficulties experienced to live a better life. For example, cognitive therapy helps individuals think positively as well as helps manage extreme feelings of anxiety.

Yehuda (2002) explained that the use of specific techniques is needed to help individuals cope with fear and emotional response to an event that causes a crisis. Counseling services are also a platform to understand, support, solve, and meet the needs of single mothers mentally, and emotionally (Abd Hamid & Salleh, 2013).

Even if the parents have separated, parents should take care of the welfare of the children in terms of common psychological, emotional, and economic needs and not place responsibility on the shoulders of the mother alone. Children who have a positive relationship with their parents are also said to provide a form of social support in enhancing psychological resources (self-esteem) and being able to control the stress that comes (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Baumrind, 1991). In addition, most single mothers face the same problem and the solution to every problem that exists can be solved if they have openness. The role of social workers and interventions is important to help divorced women who need support in the face of challenges and provide space for further helpful information. Divorce is not only a personal problem between husband and wife but also a social problem that needs to be addressed together. Therefore, the role of various parties needs to be directly and indirectly involved in providing psychological and emotional support to single mothers to improve social functioning and achieve optimal life satisfaction.

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