

Exploring the Relationship between Divorce, Loneliness, and Psychological Well-being

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ABSTRACT

Divorce represents a critical life transition profoundly influencing emotional stability and social connectedness globally. This study examined the impact of marital status and gender on loneliness and psychological well-being among adults in selected cities of Jharkhand, India. The sample comprised eighty participants, including forty married and forty divorced individuals, equally distributed by gender, recruited from Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Jamshedpur, and Dhanbad using purposive sampling technique. Data were collected using the Perceived Loneliness Scale developed by Jha in 1997 and the Psychological Well-being Scale by Sisodia and Choudhary in 2012. Statistical analysis involved independent samples t-tests and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. Results revealed that divorced individuals reported significantly higher loneliness scores and lower psychological well-being compared to their married counterparts at 0.01 level. Furthermore, significant gender differences emerged, with females experiencing greater loneliness and males demonstrating higher overall well-being levels. A very strong negative correlation was found between loneliness and psychological well-being, indicating that increased isolation corresponds directly with diminished mental health outcomes. These findings highlight the protective role of marital stability and the necessity for targeted counseling interventions for divorced populations, particularly women, to foster resilience and improve overall quality of life within the Indian cultural context. Also, Policymakers must prioritize mental health support systems immediately. Future research should explore longitudinal effects to understand causal relationships better across diverse Indian populations effectively.

Keywords: *Marital Status, Divorce, Loneliness, Psychological Well-being, Gender Differences, Mental Health*

Divorce is an important event in a person's life that brings many changes. It is not just the ending of a marriage, but it also affects a person's emotions, daily life, and relationships. After divorce, people often have to adjust to a new way of living. They may face new responsibilities, changes in their social life, and sometimes a lack of support from others. One of the common problems people face after divorce is loneliness. Loneliness means feeling alone or disconnected from others. Even if people are around, a person may still feel emotionally alone. After separation, the loss of a partner can create an empty space in life. Social circles may also change, which can increase feelings of isolation. Psychological well-being is another important aspect to understand. It refers to a person's mental and

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emotional health, such as feeling happy, satisfied with life, and able to manage stress. Divorce can affect psychological well-being in different ways. Some people may feel stress, sadness, or anxiety, while others may slowly adjust and become more independent over time. Loneliness and psychological well-being are closely connected. When a person feels lonelier, their mental health can be affected in a negative way. At the same time, having support from family and friends can help a person feel better and improve their well-being. In the Indian context, divorce is sometimes seen negatively by society. Because of this, people may feel judged or isolated, which can increase their loneliness and stress. This makes it important to study this topic more carefully. Therefore, the present study focuses on understanding the relationship between divorce, loneliness, and psychological well-being. It aims to explore how divorce affects loneliness and how both of these influence a person's mental health.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Strizzi et al. (2021) conducted research into gender and postdivorce mental and physical health has been highly inconsistent. The Gender Similarities Hypothesis suggested that there were more similarities than differences and the Divorce Stress Adjustment Perspective suggested that structural inequalities may contribute to adverse postdivorce outcomes. They conducted secondary analyses from an RCT study to investigate if there were gender-specific trajectories and whether gender was associated with outcomes (self-perceived stress, symptoms of anxiety, depression, and somatization, general hostility, and overall mental and physical health) after controlling for effects of the intervention, income, and number of children using linear mixed-effect regression modeling, and whether number of children and income influenced these outcomes. Participants were 1,239 women and 617 men from the Cooperation after Divorce (CAD) study, conducted in Denmark, a country with less income disparity, high gender equality, shared childrearing by men and women, and societal acceptance of divorce. The analyses assessing the relationship between gender and 12-month postdivorce adjustment in terms of physical and mental health outcomes revealed that for self-perceived stress, symptoms of anxiety, depression, and somatization, hostility, and overall mental and physical health in this sample postdivorce adjustment trajectories were not gender-specific, and gender was only significantly associated with stress and somatization as a time-invariant additive effect. The findings suggested gender similarities in postdivorce adjustment and contribute to the Gender Similarities Hypothesis and the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment-Perspective by assessing individuals' postdivorce adjustment in a low-stigma and relatively egalitarian setting, providing a clearer assessment of the role of gender without potentially confounding issues of structural inequalities.

Sander et al. (2020) conducted a cross-sectional study on "Mental and Physical Health Among Recently Divorced Danes" to assess health-related quality of life immediately following juridical divorce. The sample included 1,856 recently divorced Danish adults (66% women), with data collected within an average of 4-5 days after legal divorce. The Short Form 36 (SF-36) Health Assessment and the Divorce Conflict Scale (DCS) were used for data collection. Findings revealed that divorcees reported significantly poorer mental and physical health compared to the Danish normative population, particularly in vitality, social functioning, and mental health domains. Higher divorce conflict predicted worse mental health for both genders and worse physical health for women, even after controlling for sociodemographic variables

Thadathil & Sriram (2019) conducted a comprehensive review article on "Divorce, Families and Adolescents in India: A Review of Research" to synthesize empirical findings on the psychosocial determinants and consequences of divorce in the Indian context. The

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review analyzed 42 peer-reviewed Indian studies published between 2000-2018, focusing on causes of divorce, impacts on adolescents, and cultural moderators. Key findings indicated that primary causes of divorce in India include: domestic violence, alcoholism, extramarital affairs, incompatibility, and interference from extended family. Adolescents from divorced families reported higher levels of academic difficulties, emotional distress, and identity confusion compared to peers from intact families, though effects were moderated by post-divorce parental cooperation and social support. The authors emphasized that collectivistic cultural norms, stigma, and economic dependence significantly shape divorce experiences in India, often delaying marital dissolution despite marital distress. The review called for culturally adapted intervention models and policy reforms to support divorced families.

Kapila & Kumar (2015) conducted a quantitative comparative study on "Life Satisfaction and Resilience among Divorced Women in India" to examine the relationship between resilience and life satisfaction among divorced women. The sample consisted of 60 divorced women aged 30-50 years from upper and middle socio-economic backgrounds in urban India, equally divided into two groups: Group 1 (divorced <5 years; n=30) and Group 2 (divorced >5 years; n=30). Standardized instruments included the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) and the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-25). Data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation and independent t-tests. Findings revealed a significant positive correlation between resilience and life satisfaction ($r = .628, p < .01$), indicating that women with higher resilience reported greater life satisfaction. However, no significant differences were found between the two groups on either variable ($p > .05$), suggesting that time since divorce did not significantly influence psychological adjustment. The study concluded that resilience serves as a protective factor for life satisfaction among divorced Indian women, irrespective of duration since marital dissolution.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the impact of marital status and gender on loneliness and psychological well-being.
2. To study the relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being.

Hypotheses:

To address these objectives, we formulated the following hypotheses:

- **H₁**. There will be significant impact of marital status on loneliness and psychological well-being.
- **H₂**. There will be significant impact of gender on loneliness and psychological well-being.
- **H₃**. There will be significant relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being.

METHODOLOGY

The study included 80 participants were selected from Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Jamshedpur, and Dhanbad cities of Jharkhand. The sample included both male and female participants, belonging to two marital groups: married and divorced adults. Purposive sampling technique was used in this study.

Table 01 Sample Design

| Marital Status | Married | Divorced |
|----------------|---------|----------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 20 | 20 |
| Female | 20 | 20 |
| Total | 40 | 40 |
| | 80 | |

Tools

- Perceived Loneliness Scale:** The study used the Perceived Loneliness Scale developed by Praveen Kumar Jha (1997) to measure participants' feelings of loneliness. This self-report tool consists of 36 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Totally Agree" to "Totally Disagree." Total scores range from 36 to 180, where higher scores indicate greater loneliness and lower scores reflect lower loneliness. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of .84 and .82.
- Psychological Well-being Scale:** Psychological well-being was assessed using the scale developed by Dr. Devendra Singh Sisodia and Pooja Choudhary in 2012. This tool measures well-being across five dimensions: satisfaction, efficiency, sociability, mental health, and interpersonal relations. It consists of 50 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." Higher total scores indicate better psychological well-being. The scale showed acceptable reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.80.

Statistical Analysis

To test the hypotheses, t test was implemented on collected data to find out the difference and pearson r was calculated to correlation.

RESULTS

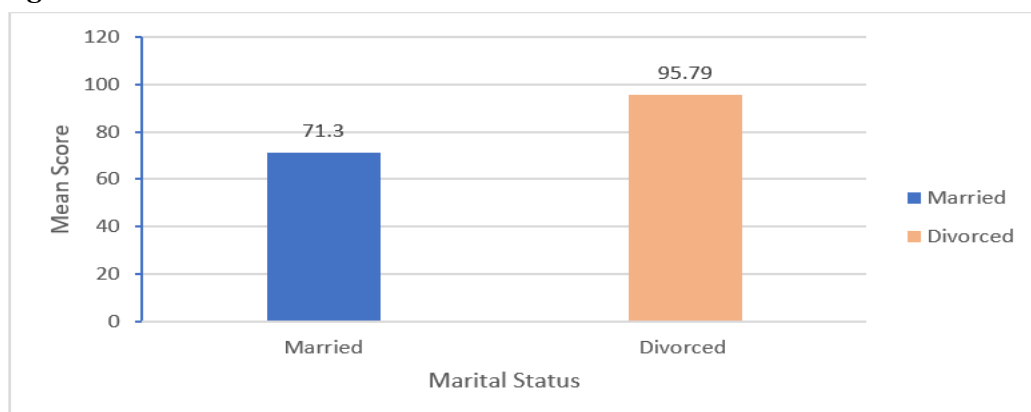
The analysis revealed the following results:

Table 02 Influence of Marital Status on Loneliness

| Subgroups | Mean | SD | Mean difference | df | t |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-----------------|----|-------|
| Married | 71.30 | 11.08 | 24.49 | 78 | 7.49* |
| Divorced | 95.79 | 14.21 | | | |

* Significant at 0.01 level

Figure 01 Mean scores on Loneliness in relation to Marital Status.



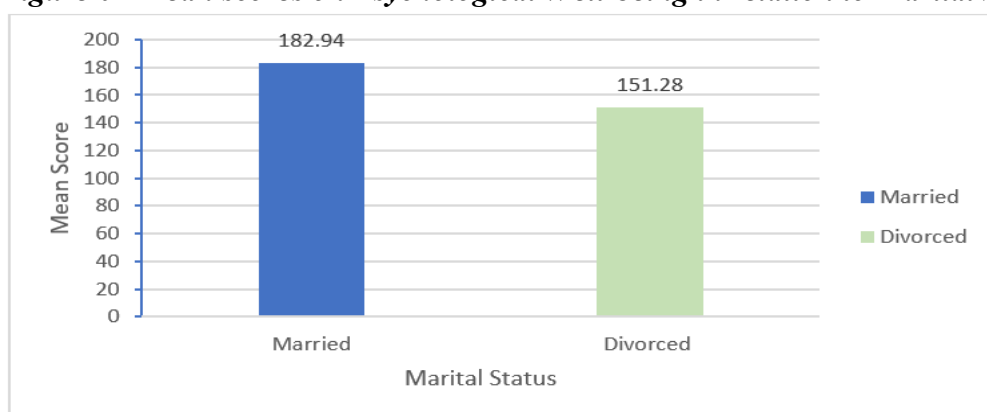
From above table 02 and figure 01 it is clear that, the mean scores among married and divorced participants were found 71.30 and 95.79 respectively. The score of t-test was found 7.49 which is significant at 0.01 level. Hence the hypothesis that, there is significant impact of marital status on loneliness among adults in selected cities of Jharkhand, is accepted here.

Table 03 Influence of Marital Status on Psychological Well-being

| Subgroups | Mean | SD | Mean difference | df | t |
|-----------|--------|-------|-----------------|----|-------|
| Married | 182.94 | 15.12 | 31.66 | 78 | 7.27* |
| Divorced | 151.28 | 17.05 | | | |

* Significant at 0.01 level

Figure 02 Mean scores on Psychological Well-being in relation to Marital Status.



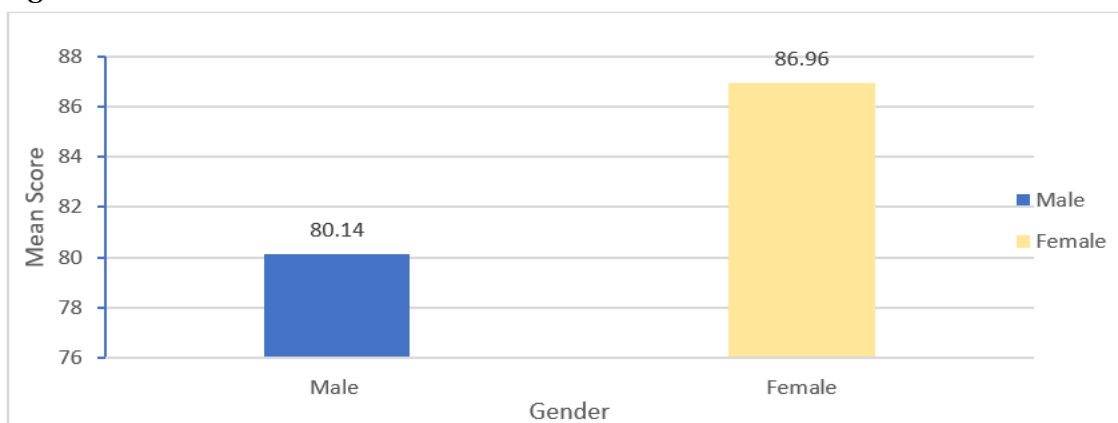
From Table 03 and Figure 02, it is evident that married participants obtained a mean psychological well-being score of 182.94, whereas divorced participants obtained a mean score of 151.28. The computed t-value of 7.27 was found to be statistically significant at 0.01 level. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that marital status has a significant impact on psychological well-being among adults in selected cities of Jharkhand is accepted.

Table 04 Influence of Gender on Loneliness

| Subgroups | Mean | SD | Mean difference | df | t |
|-----------|-------|-------|-----------------|----|-------|
| Male | 80.14 | 15.87 | 6.82 | 78 | 2.91* |
| Female | 86.96 | 16.33 | | | |

* Significant at 0.01 level

Figure 03 Mean scores on Loneliness in relation to Gender



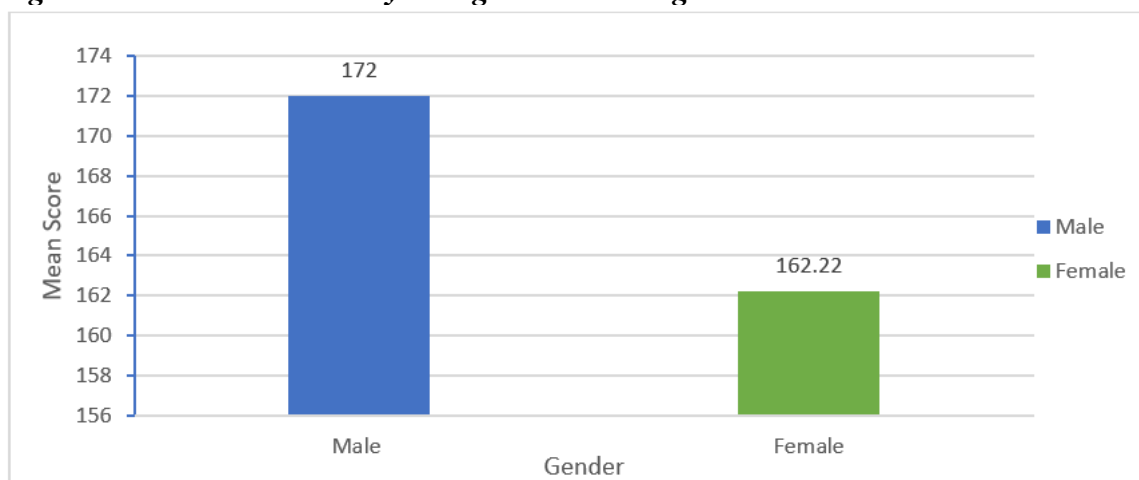
From Table 04 and Figure 03, it is evident that male participants obtained a mean loneliness score of 80.14, whereas female participants obtained a mean score of 86.96. The computed t-value of 2.91 was found to be statistically significant at 0.01 level. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that gender has a significant impact on loneliness among adults in selected cities of Jharkhand is accepted.

Table 05 Influence of Gender on Psychological Well-being

| Subgroups | Mean | SD | Mean difference | df | t |
|-----------|--------|-------|-----------------|----|-------|
| Male | 172.00 | 19.45 | 9.78 | 78 | 2.57* |
| Female | 162.22 | 20.18 | | | |

* Significant at 0.01 level

Figure 04 Mean scores on Psychological Well-being in relation to Gender



It is observed from Table 05 and Figure 04 that the mean psychological well-being scores for male and female participants were 172.00 and 162.22 respectively. A t-value of 2.57 was obtained, which was found to be significant at the 0.05 level. Consequently, the hypothesis regarding the significant impact of gender on psychological well-being among adults in selected cities of Jharkhand is accepted based on the present data.

Table 06 Correlation coefficient of psychological well-being and loneliness

| | Psychological Well-being | Loneliness |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Loneliness | -0.792** | 1 |
| Psychological Well-being | 1 | -0.792** |

* Significant at 0.01 level

From Table 06, it is clear that, the correlation coefficient was found negative ($r = -0.792$), which is significant at 0.01 level. It indicates that loneliness and psychological well-being both are negatively correlated to each other, means higher psychological well-being results lower the loneliness.

Hence, the hypothesis that, there will be significant relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being, is accepted here.

DISCUSSION

The present study reveals that marital status and gender significantly influence loneliness and psychological well-being among adults in selected cities of Jharkhand. Divorced participants reported substantially higher loneliness and lower well-being compared to married individuals, supporting Jha's (1997) contention that marital disruption weakens social connectedness. Additionally, male participants demonstrated better psychological well-being than females, consistent with Sisodia and Choudhary (2012), who observed gender-differentiated coping patterns in Indian cultural contexts. The strong negative correlation between loneliness and psychological well-being further validates Cacioppo and Patrick's (2008) evolutionary theory, positioning loneliness as a fundamental threat to mental health. Nevertheless, certain limitations warrant consideration. The relatively small sample size (N=80) restricts broader generalizability beyond the studied urban centers of Jharkhand. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences regarding the directionality between marital status, gender, and psychological outcomes. Furthermore, reliance on self-report measures may introduce response biases, while unmeasured confounders such as socioeconomic status or social support networks could influence findings.

Despite these constraints, the study offers meaningful practical implications. Mental health professionals can utilize these insights to develop targeted counseling interventions for divorced adults, particularly women, focusing on rebuilding social connections and emotional resilience. Community welfare programs may integrate screening for loneliness among vulnerable marital groups to facilitate early support. Policymakers in Jharkhand and similar regions can leverage these findings to design gender-sensitive mental health initiatives. Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of addressing relationship-based vulnerabilities to promote holistic psychological well-being, while encouraging future longitudinal investigations to explore causal mechanisms across diverse Indian populations.

CONCLUSION

This study establishes that marital status and gender significantly shape the psychological landscape of adults across Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Jamshedpur, and Dhanbad. The findings confirm that divorced individuals experience heightened loneliness and diminished psychological well-being compared to their married counterparts, highlighting the protective role of stable marital bonds. Additionally, distinct gender differences emerged, with males reporting better overall well-being and females experiencing greater loneliness, suggesting nuanced social pressures and coping mechanisms across genders. The robust inverse relationship between loneliness and well-being further emphasizes that social isolation acts as a critical barrier to mental health. These outcomes validate the proposed hypotheses and underscore the necessity of recognizing marital and gender-specific vulnerabilities in routine mental health assessments.

While limited by sample size and cross-sectional design, the results provide a foundational understanding for regional psychological dynamics in Jharkhand. Ultimately, this research calls for integrated mental health strategies that prioritize social connectivity and emotional support specifically for divorced and female populations. By addressing these specific risk factors through targeted counseling and community programs, practitioners and policymakers can foster resilience and enhance the overall quality of life within these communities. Future research should expand on these findings to develop longitudinal evidence for causal interventions.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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