

Policy Journal of Social Science Review

ISSN Online:3006-4635

ISSN Print: 3006-4627

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL DETERMINANTS OF DIVORCE IN RURAL PUNJAB: A CASE STUDY OF DISTRICT VEHDARI

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Article Details

Received on 29 May, 2026

Accepted on 25 June,
2026

Published on 28 June,
2026

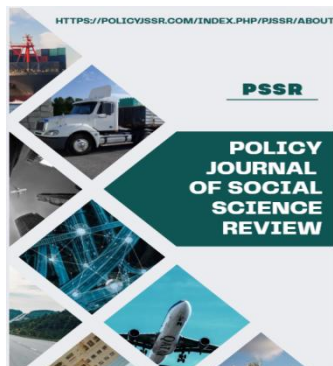
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ABSTRACT

This research paper presents a sociological investigation of the socio-economic and cultural determinants of divorce in District Vehari, Punjab, Pakistan. Divorce rates have been increasing significantly in Pakistan, particularly in Punjab province, with Vehari emerging as one of the districts with the highest prevalence of marital dissolution. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from 100 respondents (47 male, 53 female) through structured questionnaires. The study identifies financial problems (73% agreement), unemployment of spouse (62%), economic pressure from extended family (63%), and dowry-related issues (54%) as major socio-economic causes. Cultural and interpersonal factors including lack of mutual understanding (75%), poor communication (77%), interference of in-laws (70%), domestic violence (65%), and early/forced marriage (59%) were also significant contributors. Chi-square tests confirmed statistically significant associations between economic stress and divorce ($\chi^2=47.36$, $p=0.001$), communication failure and marital breakdown ($\chi^2=53.12$, $p=0.000$), and divorce with reduced economic/social security ($\chi^2=44.79$, $p=0.002$). The findings reveal that divorce in Vehari is not merely an interpersonal failure but a structural consequence of overlapping socio-economic precarity, cultural collectivism, and transitional gender relations. The study recommends pre-marital counseling, vocational training for divorcees, child welfare systems, and legal awareness reforms to address the rising divorce rates in rural Punjab.

Keywords: Divorce, Socio-economic determinants, Cultural factors, Rural Punjab, District Vehari, Khula, Marital dissolution, Pakistan



Policy Journal of Social Science Review

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

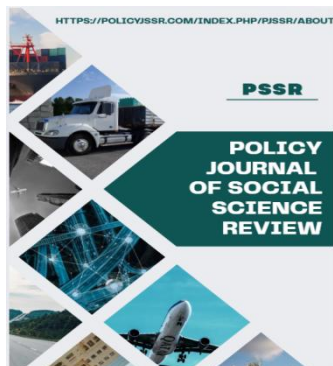
Marriage is one of the most significant social institutions in all known human cultures. Being the foundation of family building and reproduction in society, it has been given extensive economic, legal, religious, and emotional weight throughout history. The family unit, which is a creation of the institution of marriage, serves as the most important location of socialization, economic collaboration, emotional support, and the passing of cultural values through generations (Akmal & Bashir, 2025). Once this institution is broken by dissolution, divorce, or separation, its consequences are felt not only by the directly involved individuals but also by children, extended family groups, and the social structure of societies at large.

In Pakistan, marriage is a phenomenon that lies between Islamic jurisprudence, customary law (riwaj), and the codified legal system created through the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961 and the Family Courts Act 1964 (Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act, 1939, amended 1961). In this multidimensional framework, divorce has traditionally borne a very high social stigma, especially among women, and has been socialized in the dominant discourse as a symbol of moral incompetence, social deviance, or an indicator of poor character. It has been long believed that retaining marital cohesion, even in circumstances of abuse, neglect, or incompatibility, is better than the resulting social disgrace of divorce (Muazzmi & Sultana, 2025).

The statistics regarding divorce in Pakistan are especially impressive in Punjab, the largest and most populated province. Khula cases (divorce petitions filed by women) alone numbered 13,299 in 2012, rising to 14,243 in 2013 and 16,942 in 2014, before reaching 18,901 in 2016. A more recent national statistic reveals that the overall rate of divorce in 36 Punjabi districts rose by some 35 percent in a five-year period, with women-initiated divorce cases always outnumbering men-initiated ones by up to 25 percent. In 2020 alone, cases of women seeking khula increased by more than 700 percent nationally (Uddin, 2020).

1.2 District Vehari: A Contextual Overview

District Vehari, situated in the southern part of Punjab, is a particularly relevant area of sociological interest. Vehari is a rural district with high rural poverty rates, low access to formal education, deeply rooted patriarchal traditions, and high socioeconomic inequality. It is mainly Punjabi-speaking, Muslim, and relies on agricultural livelihoods with a highly organized social structure based on biradari



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ISSN Online:3006-4635

ISSN Print: 3006-4627

(patrilineal kinship groups), honor principles (izzat), and joint or extended family systems.

The district has a population of approximately 3.43 million people on a land area of 4,364 square kilometers, with a density of 786 persons per km², a sex ratio of 102.33 males to 100 females, and a total literacy rate of 59.10 percent (56.43 percent among males and 51.57 percent among females). The country is predominantly agrarian, the primary crops being cotton, sugarcane, wheat, and maize; agriculture and related livestock use more than half of the labor force (Punjab Bureau of Statistics; Vehari District Profile, 2021).

Simultaneously, the district is rapidly changing socially due to migration to urban areas, the spread of mobile telephony and social media, rising female literacy and education, and changing economic factors such as inflation and unemployment. The combination of these overlapping forces establishes the very circumstances within which conventional standards of marriage are subject to strains and in which divorce rates are likely to rise.

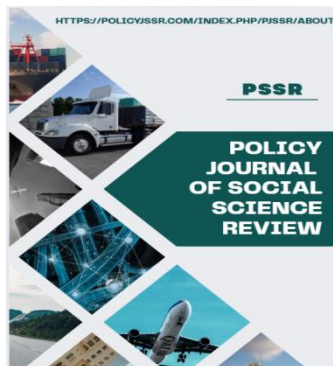
1.3 Statement of the Problem

Marriage is regarded as one of the most significant social institutions in Pakistani society as it is essential for emotional support, social stability, cultural continuity, and the formation of families. The rate of divorce has, however, sharply risen in the last few years in Pakistan, especially in Punjab. The divorce rates are rising as a result of socio-economic changes, changes in gender roles, financial pressures, domestic conflicts, and cultural changes, whereas divorce was once a taboo and a very stigmatizing event.

District Vehari, in South Punjab, is an area with a largely rural and agrarian society that has a deep impact on marital relations due to traditional family norms, patriarchal norms, reliance on the economy, and the biradari system. Meanwhile, with the advent of modernization, inflation, unemployment, migration, exposure to social media, and awareness among women, expectations in marriage have also changed. All these dynamics have led to marital instability and more divorce and khula cases.

Although the divorce rate in South Punjab has increased, few sociological researches have been carried out particularly in District Vehari. The unique socio-cultural dynamics of rural districts have not been explored much in previous studies, which have mostly focused on major cities like Lahore, Karachi, and Faisalabad.

1.4 Research Objectives



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1. To identify the major socio-economic, cultural, and interpersonal causes of divorce in District Vehari, Punjab, Pakistan.
2. To examine the social, psychological, and economic implications of divorce for divorced individuals in District Vehari.
3. To explore the effects of divorce on children in terms of their socialization, education, and emotional well-being.
4. To analyze the role of extended family, community norms, and religious or legal institutions in the process and outcomes of divorce.
5. To suggest evidence-based recommendations for government, policymakers, and local community stakeholders to prevent unnecessary divorces and mitigate their adverse implications.

1.5 Research Questions

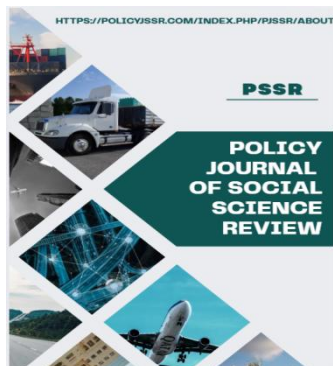
1. What are the main socio-economic reasons behind divorce in District Vehari, Punjab, Pakistan?
2. What are the cultural and interpersonal factors responsible for the dissolution of marriages in District Vehari?
3. What are the psychological, social, and economic issues that divorced people face?
4. What impact does divorce have on children's emotional, educational, and social development?
5. What role do extended families, community norms, and legal institutions play in the divorce process?

1.6 Theoretical Framework

The present study relies on a multi-theoretical framework incorporating structural-functionalism, feminist sociology, social exchange theory, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to provide a comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding divorce in District Vehari.

Structural-Functionalism, (Durkheim, 1893/1964; Parsons, 1951) views divorce as a maladjustment that disrupts the stability and social cohesion of the family, potentially resulting in anomie in conservative societies. This perspective helps shed light on how macro-level social changes such as urbanization, industrialization, and the breakdown of extended family support systems contribute to the destabilization of marital institutions.

Feminist Sociological Perspectives are essential for explaining the gendered aspects of divorce in Pakistan. The increasing rates of female-initiated divorce (khula) can be understood as the extension of individual agency to women who have traditionally



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lacked legitimate ways out of unbearable marriages. Simultaneously, feminist analysis addresses the structural inequalities such as economic dependence, lack of legal knowledge, and social stigma that still limit women's choices.

Social Exchange Theory (Nakonezny & Denton, 2008) offers a micro-level analytical approach to the decision to divorce as a calculus of costs of continuing a marriage, obstacles to leaving, and perceived benefits of other options. This framework is consistent with empirical evidence that has repeatedly found financial strain, emotional dissatisfaction, domestic violence, and incompatibility as immediate antecedents of the decision to pursue dissolution.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, provides an integrative framework to situate individual experiences of divorce within broader social ecology, including microsystem (spousal relationship), mesosystem (family-school-community interactions), exosystem (workplace conditions, legal institutions, media), and macrosystem (Islamic norms, state legal frameworks, national economic conditions).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

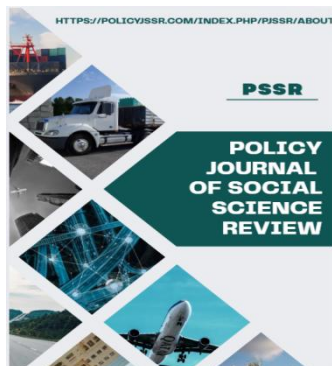
2.1 Global Perspectives on Divorce

Sociological literature on divorce is an immense and multidisciplinary field. Since the middle of the twentieth century, divorce rates have been rising at an alarming rate due to a combination of liberalization of laws, economic empowerment of women, shifting cultural demands of marriage, and the erosion of religious and communal sanctions against dissolution (Amato, 2010).

Scholarly literature has established a constellation of risk factors regarding marital breakdown across different cultural settings. One of the most widely-established antecedents of divorce is economic stress, including unemployment, poverty, financial conflict, and income instability. The connection between economic hardship and divorce works on several different levels: directly, by creating material conflicts about resource allocation; indirectly, by causing more psychological distress, less positive interactions, and a higher probability of substance abuse and domestic violence (Sánchez, 2022).

2. Divorce in Pakistan: National Context

The sociology of divorce in Pakistan has evolved considerably within the last ten years. Earlier works described the rising ratio of divorce and its perceived reasons as lack of tolerance, illiteracy, and financial hardship (Haris & Khan, 2017). Ramzan et al. (2018) identified unemployment, age-related incompatibility, lack of trust, and illiteracy as the most frequently cited causal factors.



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More recent literature has adopted more theoretically elaborate approaches. Zafeer, Maqbool, and Yanping (2022) reported that psychological factors (depression, anxiety, and stress) and social factors (family pressure, interference by in-laws, and financial problems) had significant and negative effects on both divorced and married women. Arshad et al. (2024) used rare events logistic regression to investigate the risk of divorce based on gender roles, establishing that females have a higher risk of divorce in all conditions of estimation.

2.3 Khula: Wife-Initiated Divorce in Pakistan

In Pakistan, khula, the right of women to have marriage dissolved by a court of law based on Islamic law, has become the focus of growing scholarly and popular interest. The decisions of high courts over decades have gradually transformed khula from a fault-based to a no-fault divorce, eliminating the necessity of husbandly consent and becoming the key means of marital dissolution initiated by females in Pakistan (Rafi & Ullah, 2021).

However, even with legal reform, Pakistani women continue to face the social costs of divorce. Muazzmi and Sultana (2025) found that the social acceptability of divorce and khula ($M=2.17$, $SD=0.67$) was extremely low, whereas the level of stigmatization ($M=4.74$, $SD=0.67$) was high.

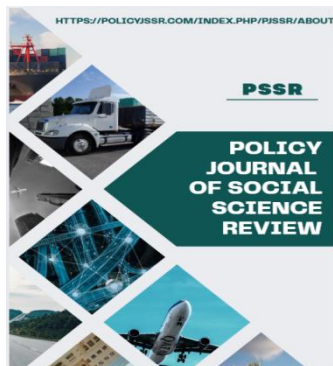
2.4 Divorce in South Punjab: Emerging Evidence

The territory of South Punjab has a unique socioeconomic character that influences its marriage dynamics differently from major urban centers of Central Punjab. South Punjab is characterized by lower average income, more rural poverty, greater reliance on agricultural livelihoods, more tribal and biradari social organization, and traditionally lower levels of female education and labor force participation (Hasan & Mohey-ud-Din, 2019).

Akmal and Bashir (2025) conducted the most extensive recent study of South Punjab specifically, identifying determinants such as in-laws interference, unmet expectations, early and forced marriages, poverty and inflation, personality disorders, Western cultural influence, and lack of pre-marital verification as key causes of divorce. Women respondents mentioned unmet emotional needs and exchange marriages (watta-satta) more than men, highlighting the significance of gendered analysis in understanding divorce.

2.5 Research Gap

The analysis of available literature indicates substantial gaps that the current study addresses. First, no work has explicitly studied divorce in District Vehari, creating a



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geographic gap in an expanding body of district-level research. Second, the current literature is either centered on major urban centers or based on female respondents only, creating a biased image of divorce dynamics. Third, consequences of divorce, especially on children, have not been systematically researched in Pakistan compared to causes of divorce.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A quantitative research approach was employed, utilizing structured questionnaires to collect responses from 100 respondents (47 male, 53 female). The research design encompassed systematic arrangements of strategies and procedures employed to collect and analyze data about the variables identified in the study protocol.

3.2 Universe/Population

The universe of the study comprised divorced individuals and key informants associated with divorce cases in District Vehari, Punjab, Pakistan. The target population primarily included divorced men and women residing in different areas (urban and semi-urban) of District Vehari.

3.3 Sampling Framework

The sampling was conducted in three phases:

First Phase: Punjab was selected through simple random sampling from the four provinces of Pakistan.

Second Phase: Vehari was selected through purposive sampling technique from Punjab.

Third Phase: A total of 100 respondents were randomly selected from the selected district.

3.4 Data Collection Tools

A well-structured questionnaire was designed in light of the research objectives, consisting of:

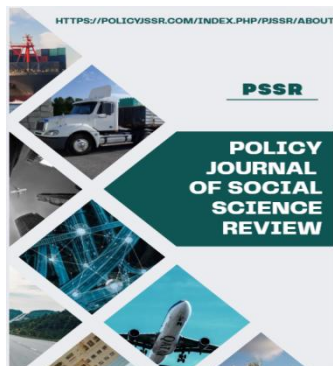
Socio-demographic information (age, gender, education, occupation, income, residence) Items measuring socio-economic, cultural, and interpersonal causes of divorce

Items assessing implications of divorce for respondents

Items related to children's education, behavior, and emotional well-being

3.5 Data Analysis

Collected data were coded and entered into SPSS for analysis. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) were used to summarize



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respondents' characteristics. Inferential statistics (chi-square tests) were applied to examine relationships between causes and implications of divorce and relevant socio-demographic factors.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 4.1: Distribution of Respondents According to Gender

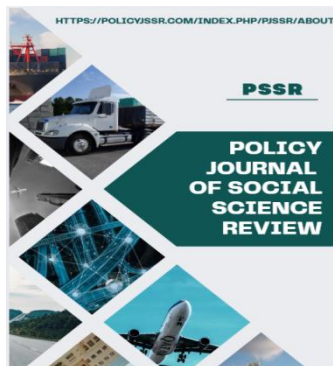
Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	47	47.00
Female	53	53.00
Total	100	100

The gender distribution shows a balanced representation with 47% males and 53% females. This ensures that both male and female views are well represented, increasing the reliability and generalizability of the results.

Table 4.2: Distribution of Respondents According to Age

Age (Years)	Frequency	Percentage
18-25	23	23.00
26-35	34	34.00
36-45	26	26.00
46+	17	17.00
Total	100	100

The age distribution shows that the largest percentage (34%) represents the 26-35 age group. This is particularly notable as this is the age of critical life transitions including marriage, childbearing, and career building, which may create greater stress and lead to marital strife.



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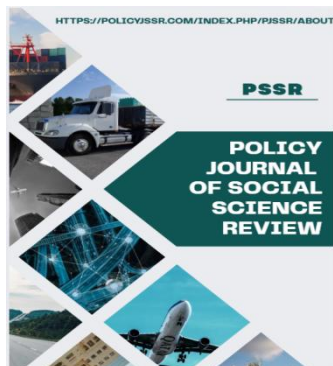
Table 4.3: Distribution of Respondents According to Education Level

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	13	13.00
Primary	19	19.00
Secondary	29	29.00
Graduate	23	23.00
Postgraduate	16	16.00
Total	100	100

The educational profile is fairly diverse, with the majority having secondary and higher education. Higher education is commonly related to increased levels of awareness concerning personal rights, communication skills, and economic opportunities.

Table 4.4: Distribution of Respondents According to Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Employed	27	27.00
Self-employed	21	21.00
Unemployed	19	19.00
Homemaker	33	33.00
Total	100	100



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The high percentage of homemakers (33%) reflects the gendered division of labor usually prevalent in the study area. Homemakers, often women, may feel financially dependent, which affects their marital stability and decision-making over divorce.

Table 4.5: Distribution of Respondents According to Monthly Income

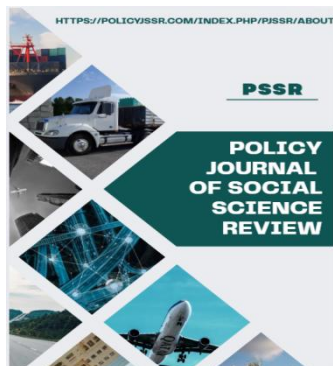
Monthly Income (PKR)	Frequency	Percentage
<20,000	21	21.00
20,001-50,000	33	33.00
50,001-100,000	25	25.00
100,000+	21	21.00
Total	100	100

The majority of respondents were in the middle-income bracket (33% in 20,001-50,000 PKR). Income level is a decisive variable in marital stability as it directly impacts living standards, financial security, and stress levels.

4.2 Socio-Economic Causes of Divorce

Table 4.8: Distribution of Respondents According to Socio-Economic Causes of Divorce (N=100)

Statement	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Total Agreement %
Financial problems contributed to my divorce	04.00	09.00	14.00	41.00	32.00	73.00
Unemployment of my spouse	07.00	10.00	21.00	32.00	30.00	62.00



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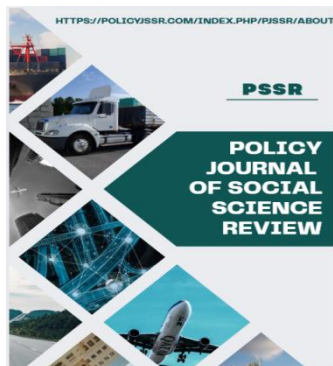
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Statement	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Total Agree ment %
was a major factor						
Economic pressure from extended family affected my marriage	04.00	16.00	17.00	39.00	24.00	63.00
Dowry-related issues contributed to marital conflict	08.00	17.00	21.00	28.00	26.00	54.00
Differences in social class or lifestyle caused problems	11.00	12.00	25.00	29.00	23.00	52.00

Table 4.8 shows the breakdown of socio-economic reasons leading to divorce. The results clearly reveal that economic conditions are central and decisive in determining marital stability. A significant percentage of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that their marital breakdown was due to financial issues (73%), unemployment of a spouse (62%), and economic pressure from extended family (63%).

Financial problems emerged as the most prevalent cause, with 41% agreeing and 32% strongly agreeing that financial instability was the cause of their divorce. This brings out the critical role economic security plays in the maintenance of marital relationships. Economic crisis may cause long-term stress, restricted access to



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fundamental needs, and conflict over resource distribution, which undermine the emotional relationship between spouses.

Unemployment of spouse (62% agreement) shows the significance of economic contribution in a household. Financial responsibility in most traditional communities such as District Vehari is usually closely linked with gender roles. The inability to live up to these expectations may lead to frustration, loss of self-esteem, and marital conflict.

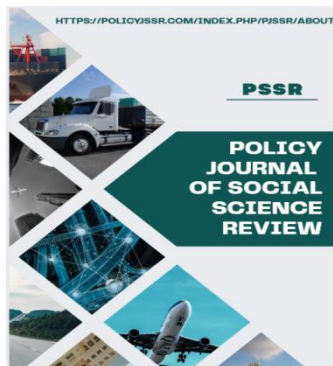
Economic pressure from extended family (63% agreement) is also noteworthy. In joint families, there may be expectations of financial support, sharing of resources, and dowry requirements that cause further strain on couples. These statistics indicate that these stresses might build up tension and lead to marital discontent.

Dowry-related issues (54% agreement) and **differences in social status or lifestyle** (52%) further portray the merging of economic and cultural factors. Although these variables indicate slightly lower levels of agreement, they nevertheless constitute serious sources of tension in marriages.

4.3 Cultural and Interpersonal Causes of Divorce

Table 4.9: Distribution of Respondents According to Cultural and Interpersonal Causes (N=100)

Statement	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Total Agreement %
Lack of mutual understanding led to marital conflict	04.00	05.00	16.00	44.00	31.00	75.00
Domestic violence was a cause of	11.00	10.00	14.00	36.00	29.00	65.00

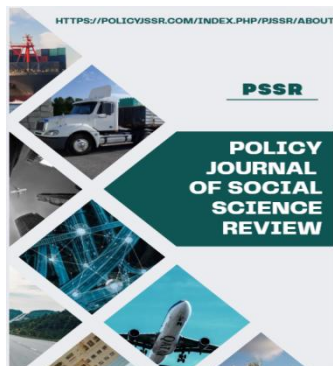


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Statement	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Total Agreement %
divorce						
Interference of in-laws contributed to divorce	05.00	08.00	17.00	38.00	32.00	70.00
Poor communication between partners caused problems	04.00	09.00	10.00	41.00	36.00	77.00
Early or forced marriage contributed to divorce	09.00	13.00	19.00	32.00	27.00	59.00
Infidelity was a factor in divorce	11.00	14.00	14.00	29.00	32.00	61.00



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Statement	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Total Agreement %
Cultural or religious misunderstandings affected the marriage	09.00	10.00	21.00	36.00	24.00	60.00

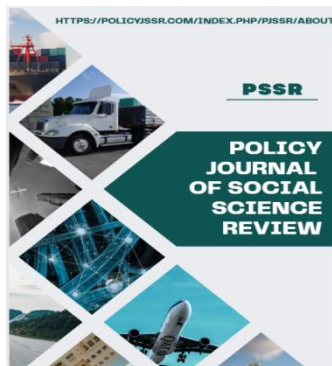
Table 4.9 shows that relational and behavioral aspects play an equally, or more important, role in divorce than economic ones. The statistics indicate that the most noticeable causes of marital breakdown include poor communication (77%), lack of mutual understanding (75%), and interference by in-laws (70%).

Poor communication emerged as the most important factor, with 41% concurring and 36% strongly concurring. Conflict resolution, emotional expression, and mutual respect are impossible without effective communication. In the event of ineffective communication, confusion and unsolved problems begin to build up and emotions grow apart, ultimately resulting in separation.

Lack of mutual understanding (75% agreement) supports this result, indicating that incompatibility of values, expectations, and personality traits may put significant strain on marital relationships. Couples who do not build mutual understanding have greater chances of experiencing continuing conflict.

Interference by in-laws (70% agreement) points to the role of extended families within the study area. Although family support may be helpful, too much interference may destroy the independence of the couple and cause further stress. This interference of in-laws remains a pillar of marital instability in the area, showing the continuous conflict between dyadic autonomy and collectivist society.

Domestic violence (65% agreement) and **infidelity** (61% agreement) are serious violations of trust and safety listed as significant causes. These elements, in addition to harming the emotional base of the relationship, provide a climate that cannot support long-term relationships.



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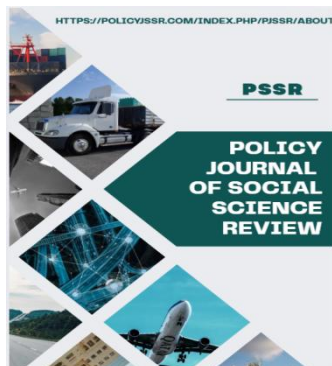
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Early or forced marriage (59% agreement) implies that the absence of consent and readiness may result in dissatisfaction and instability. **Cultural and religious misunderstandings** (60% agreement) show how differences in beliefs and practices can also lead to conflict.

4.4 Implications of Divorce

Table 4.10: Distribution of Respondents According to Implications of Divorce (N=100)

Statement	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Total Agreement %
Divorce negatively affected my mental health	05.00	06.00	09.00	46.00	34.00	80.00
Divorce negatively affected my social relationships	06.00	10.00	14.00	41.00	29.00	70.00
Divorce created financial difficulties for me	08.00	07.00	16.00	39.00	31.00	70.00



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I experienced social stigma after divorce	12.00	08.00	14.00	34.00	32.00	66.00
Divorce improved my personal well-being	21.00	13.00	22.00	27.00	17.00	44.00

Table 4.10 indicates that the implications of divorce are too complex and multidimensional to interpret divorce as simply a legal termination of marriage. It is a real life event with extensive psychological, social, and economic impacts.

Mental health effects (80% agreement) are the most prominent consequence. Having 46% of respondents agreeing and 34% strongly agreeing that divorce negatively impacted their mental health, it is clear that in most cases divorce causes emotional distress. Such distress can be experienced as anxiety, depression, loneliness, and loss of self-worth.

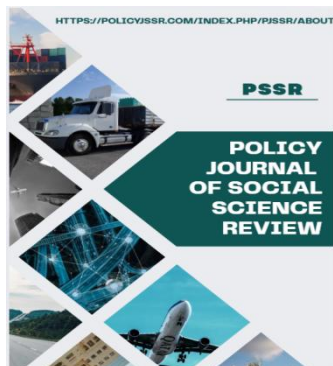
Financial instability (70% agreement) is also a significant factor. Sharing the wealth, the loss of mutual income, and high standards of living can considerably burden individuals' budgets. This is especially applicable to individuals who were economically dependent when in marriage, like homemakers.

Social relationship disruption (70% agreement) and **social stigma** (66% agreement) are severe consequences. This can be explained by the stigma attached to divorce in traditional societies where the divorced, especially women, can be excluded or judged by society. This stigma may result in isolation and lack of involvement in community life.

Improved personal well-being (44% agreement) suggests that divorce can be a source of freedom and self-development for those in very hostile or abusive relationships. It brings out the two sides of divorce as a cause of misery and a chance for positive changes.

4.5 Effects on Children

Table 4.11: Distribution of Respondents According to Effects on Children (N=100)



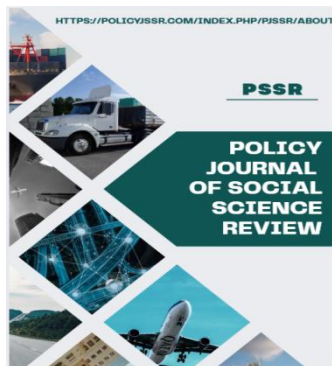
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Table 4.11 reveals that children form one of the most vulnerable stakeholders during

Statement	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Total Agreement %
Divorce negatively affected children's emotional well-being	03.00	05.00	12.00	43.00	37.00	80.00
Divorce affected children's academic performance	05.00	09.00	16.00	39.00	31.00	70.00
Children faced social adjustment problems after divorce	07.00	11.00	13.00	41.00	28.00	69.00
Children maintained a healthy relationship with both parents	13.00	08.00	21.00	27.00	31.00	58.00



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the process of marital dissolution. The results show that a considerable percentage of interviewees view that divorce has negative implications on the emotional health of children (80%), the level of academic achievement (70%), and the social adaptation of children.

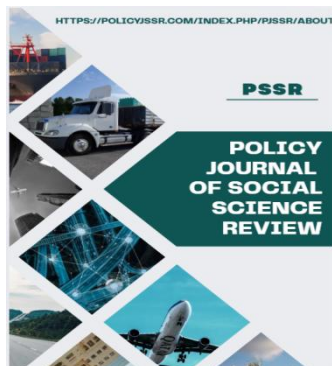
Emotional impact on children (80% agreement) is very dramatic. As 43% of respondents indicated that divorce has negative effects on the emotional health of children, and 37% strongly agreed, it is clear that the separation of parents may cause a sense of insecurity, anxiety, and confusion in children.

Academic performance (70% agreement) is greatly affected by divorce. This can be attributed to a mixture of factors, such as less parental care, change of residence, and emotional turmoil. Children who are in disrupted families may struggle to focus on their studies, resulting in deteriorating academic performance.

Social adjustment problems (69% agreement) further bring out the plight of children of divorced parents. They can have challenges with establishing and sustaining relationships not only with the family but also with society in general.

4.6 Institutional Roles

Statement	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Total Agreement %
Extended family helped in resolving marital conflicts	05.00	09.00	16.00	39.00	31.00	70.00
Community norms discourage divorce	07.00	11.00	13.00	41.00	28.00	69.00
Religious	13.00	08.00	21.00	27.00	31.00	58.00



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institutions played a role in conflict resolution						
Legal procedures for divorce were fair and supportive	03.00	05.00	12.00	43.00	37.00	80.00

Table 4.12: Distribution of Respondents According to Institutions and Society (N=100)

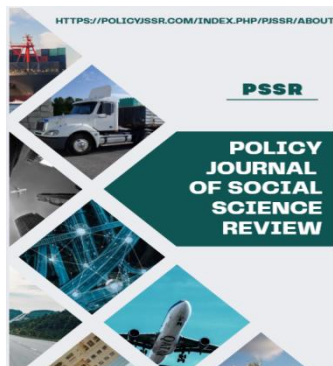
Table 4.12 analyzes the contribution of social institutions to the development of marital relationships and divorce, showing a complex interaction between the family, community, religion, and legal systems.

Extended family (70% agreement) plays a significant role. District Vehari is a region with joint family systems, and extended family members are more likely to be involved in marriage relations. Although this involvement may offer support and mediation in times of conflict, it may also result in interference and more pressure on the couple.

Community norms (69% agreement) are critical deterrents to divorce, indicating the high cultural value on marriage stability and family preservation. Although these norms might facilitate commitment and resilience in relationships, they can also discourage people from leaving unhealthy or abusive marriages.

Religious institutions (58% agreement) are seen as valuable centers of guidance and peace. Their impact can contribute to strengthening moral principles and counseling couples who have problems. These institutions may, however, be more or less effective based on the availability and applicability of their services.

Legal procedures (80% agreement) are perceived as fair and supportive, implying a certain trust in formal systems. This high degree of trust is a major change indicating that as traditional mediatory systems face the realities of modernity, people are increasingly resorting to formal legal protections.



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4.7 Chi-Square Analysis

Hypothesis 1: Higher levels of economic stress are positively associated with the likelihood of divorce

Table 4.14: Association Between Economic Stress and Divorce

Test	Value	D.F.	P. Value
Chi-Square	47.36	15	0.001*

The chi-square test result ($\chi^2 = 47.36$, $df=15$, $p=0.001$) confirms a statistically significant relationship between economic stress and divorce. The higher the level of perceived economic pressure, the more the likelihood of divorce agreement. This is most evident in the category "Strongly agree" of economic stress, where a significant majority (13 out of 22 respondents) strongly agreed with the fact of divorce as well.

Hypothesis 2: Lack of effective communication between spouses significantly contributes to marital breakdown

Table 4.15: Relationship Between Communication Level and Divorce

Test	Value	D.F.	P. Value
Chi-Square	53.12	17	0.000*

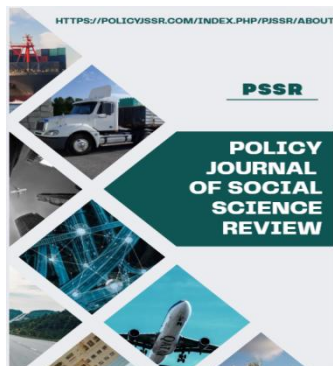
The chi-square test value ($\chi^2 = 53.12$, $df=17$, $p=0.000$) is highly significant, confirming that communication failure is not a secondary effect of marital dissolution but rather a primary cause. The data show a close and consistent inverse correlation: the less effective the communication, the higher the probability of marital breakdown.

Hypothesis 3: Divorce has a statistically significant negative association with economic security and social support

Table 4.16: Association Between Divorce and Economic/Social Security

Test	Value	D.F.	P. Value
Chi-Square	44.79	15	0.002*

The chi-square value ($\chi^2=44.79$, $p=0.002$) confirms the negative correlation: the more people agree with divorce, the lower the opinion about economic and social security.



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ISSN Online:3006-4635

ISSN Print: 3006-4627

The Vulnerability Framework postulates that divorce is a de-stabilizing experience that interferes with both material and relational capitals.

Hypothesis 4: Children of divorced parents are more likely to experience educational disruption and emotional difficulties

Table 4.17: Relationship Between Divorce and Children's Outcomes

Test	Value	D.F.	P. Value
Chi-Square	46.91	16	0.000*

The chi-square test value ($\chi^2=46.91$, $p=0.000$) confirms a strong statistical pattern: the higher the agreement with divorce, the higher the negative child outcomes reporting. This is more pronounced in respondents who strongly agree with the phenomenon of divorce, where a definite majority also report more significant levels of negative effects on children.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Pre-Marital and Marital Counseling

Community-based counseling programs should be established under Union Councils and mosques, focusing on communication, expectation management, and conflict resolution. These programs should be linked to existing religious organizations (58% saw a role in Table 4.12) to be culturally acceptable.

2. Economic Support for Divorcees

Vocational training and microfinance programs should be provided to women (mostly homemakers, 33% of the sample) through Bait-ul-Maal or provincial programs to enable them to overcome financial crises (70% reported financial difficulties). Digitized tracking should be used to enhance nafaqah enforcement.

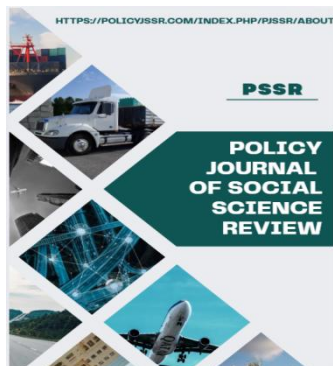
5.3 Child Welfare Systems

Co-parenting mediation and school-based counseling should be implemented to eliminate emotional and academic disruptions (80%/70% agreement). Community support groups should be piloted in Vehari to minimize adjustment issues (69%).

5.4 Legal and Awareness Reforms

Union Council processes should be digitized to reduce khula delays and costs. Awareness campaigns about khula rights should be expanded to reduce stigma (72% report more stigma against women).

5.5 Family Mediation Centers



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District-level centers should be established to address in-law intrusion and economic strains while positively engaging extended families in the mediation process.

6. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that divorce in District Vehari is not merely an interpersonal failure but a structural consequence of overlapping socio-economic precarity, cultural collectivism, and transitional gender relations in rural South Punjab. Financial instability, unemployment, and the pressure of extended family are economic stressors that serve as underlying triggers in a cotton-belt economy susceptible to inflation, climate shocks, and market volatility. These are exacerbated by interpersonal failures, especially inappropriate communication and interference of in-laws in joint-family systems. Domestic violence and early/forced marriages are indicators of longstanding patriarchal norms.

The statistically significant hypotheses confirm the theoretical integrations: economic stress models explain material triggers; symbolic interactionism sheds light on failures in communication and meaning negotiations; and conflict/feminist perspectives explain power imbalances in patriarchal joint families.

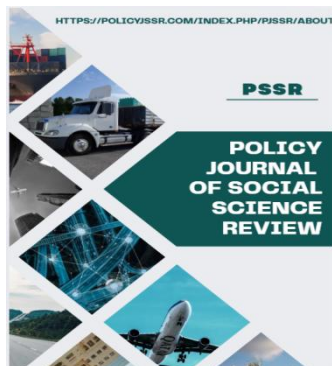
The consequences reveal a deep human price: generalized mental health degradation, social stigma (particularly for women), financial instability (greater in khula cases), and intergenerational transmission through children's emotional, academic, and adjustment problems. However, the 44% reporting personal well-being gains emphasizes divorce as a possible emancipatory route from abusive or incompatible unions.

To address these challenges, the study recommends multi-level interventions including pre-marital counseling, economic support for divorcees, child welfare systems, legal awareness reforms, and family mediation centers. These interventions should balance both marital preservation and individual rights, recognizing that increasing divorce in Vehari is an indicator of a larger societal change where traditional tolerance is being eroded by modernization, media, and female literacy, while being limited by the absence of positive post-dissolution support and enforcement mechanisms.

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