

Psychological Distress for Divorced Women in Baghdad: A Cross-Sectional Study

الضيق النفسي للنساء المطلقات في بغداد: دراسة مستعرضة

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الخلاصة:

الهدف: تهدف الدراسة الحالية الى تقييم الضغط النفسي عند النساء المطلقات في بغداد ويجاد العلاقة المعنوية بين الضغط النفسي والعمر، المستوى التعليمي، إنجاب الاطفال، عدد الاطفال، حضانة الاطفال، وفترة الطلاق.

المنهجية: أجريت دراسة وصفية مستعرضة للفترة من الثاني لشهر ايار لغاية 30 من شهر تشرين الثاني 2015. شملت عينة الدراسة 50 امرأة مطلقة والتي أختيرت بالطريقة القصدية (عينة غير احتمالية) واللواتي يقصدن دائرة الرعاية الاجتماعية في المجلس البلدي المحلي في مدينة الصدر في بغداد، قطاع الرصافة. تم استخدام الاستبيان المصمم من قبل الباحثين للدراسة الحالية. وقد تم جمع البيانات من خلال استخدام استبيان الملئ الذاتي كوسيلة لجمع البيانات. وأجريت التحليلات الاحصائية كالتكرارات، النسب المئوية، الوسيط، الانحراف المعياري ومربع كاي باستخدام الحزمة الاحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية النسخة 15.0.

النتائج: بينت نتائج الدراسة ان أعمار النساء المطلقات تتراوح بين 20 – 29 سنة، ضمن مستوى تعليمي ابتدائية وثانوية، ولديهن 1-3 طفل، مسؤولات عن حضانة اطفالهن، فترة الطلاق بالنسبة لهن كانت 2-4 سنوات. وأظهرت نتائج الدراسة ان اكثر من نصف النساء لديهن مستوى متوسط الى عالي من الضغط النفسي وعدم وجود علاقات ذات دلالة احصائية بين الضغط النفسي والخصائص الاجتماعية والديموغرافية للنساء المطلقات كالعمر، المستوى التعليمي، إنجاب الطفل، عدد الاطفال، حضانة الاطفال وفترة الطلاق.

الاستنتاج: استنتجت الدراسة الى ان الطلاق منتشر بشكل كبير بين الفئة العمرية من 20-40 سنة بين النساء وكان لديهن ضغط نفسي متوسط الى شديد.

التوصيات: أوصت الدراسة الحالية على التأكيد على دور الاعلام في تغيير النظرة السلبية تجاه المرأة المطلقة، وأوصت الدراسة ايضا على التركيز على الدور الحكومي لدعم هؤلاء النساء وتقديم البرامج الترفيهية والتأهيلية لهم.

Abstract

Objectives: The present study aims to assess the level of psychological distress among divorced women in Baghdad and to find out the significant relationship between psychological and age, educational level, having children, number of children, custody of children and period of divorce.

Methodology: A cross-sectional descriptive study that carried out for the period from 2nd May to 30th November, 2015. A sample of 50 divorced women is selected purposively (non probability sample) who were attending the social welfare department at the local municipal council in Al-Sadir city in Baghdad, Al-Rasafa sector. A semi-structured questionnaire was used by the investigators for the present study. The data have been collected through the utilization of the self administrative questionnaire as a mean of data collection. Statistical analyses were conducted such as frequencies, percentage, mean, standard deviation and chi-square by using statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 15.0.

Results: The results reveal that ages of divorced women were ranged from 20-29 year old, with educational level of primary/secondary school, having 1-3 children, and they are responsible for custody of their children, the period of divorced for them was 2-4 years. The results show that more than half of divorced women experiencing moderate to high level of psychological distress and there is no significant relationship between psychological distress among divorced women and their age, educational level, having children, number of children, custody of children and period of divorce.

Conclusions: The study concluded that divorce is highly prevalent at age group 20-40 years old among women who they have moderate to severe psychological distress.

Recommendations: The study recommended on emphasis on the role of media to change the negative view towards divorced women, the study also recommended on emphasis of governmental role for supporting these women and providing recreational and rehabilitative programs for them.

Key Words: Psychological Distress, Divorced women.

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INTRODUCTION

Divorce is one of the social phenomenons that have been considered as a main problem in the society which has had a crushing effect on both family system and the society ⁽¹⁾. Divorce has been considered as a bereavement process which through directing his/her integrity and feeling secure, predicts his/her anxiety. Loss of social status, economical security and social security network, such as married and common friends, all of are the consequences of divorce and spouse's absence. Therefore, there are many psychological problems will accompanied with divorce ⁽²⁾.

According to Bricose (2014), divorce is believed to be a social problem which has a hard influence on the individuals' lives who engage it. It has been shown that divorce is not only tears apart the marital link, but also, because of its tension up, leads to disjoining the relationships between individuals (3).

Divorce is the "legal dissolution of a socially and legally recognized marital relationship that alters the obligations and privileges of the two persons involved. It is also a major life transition has far-reaching social, pathological, legal, personal, economic, and personal consequences" ⁽⁴⁾.

In the other wards, the term of divorce is counted as the marriage termination. A broken relationship is the most awful situation for a individual that results into an emotional reverse. The indicators of mental health that are influenced by divorce are related to depression, sadness, anger, aggressiveness, low self-esteem, and anxiety. Frequently blaming of self is may be shown by person for this mischance. Definitely, adapting to divorce can be a straining process despite seeking termination relief of a problematic marriage. Continuing in an abusive and unsatisfying marriage relationship has had larger effect on the psychological aspects of spouses and children rather than choosing to be parted amicable or through court ⁽⁵⁾.

In spit of both the husband and wife are hurt from the displeasing outcomes of divorce, absolutely, according to previous studies, the women are much more vulnerable than men after divorce ⁽⁶⁾.

The mental disorder especially depression is the most significant result of that serious event. It has been inferred that the divorced persons feel they are hated and have been disapproved from the groups which they have been related to. The feeling of being supported by the others is the most valuable thing for the divorced individual ⁽¹⁾. Studies show that the divorced women are more vulnerable than the married to mental, emotional, physical and social impairments such as anxiety, depression, suicide, and heart diseases ⁽⁷⁾.

The well-being of women is influenced by divorce in many different ways. For example, women have lower incomes after divorce, which may predict of higher level of psychological distress. The psychological well-being of divorced women is also affected in a more negative way, in addition to task overload ⁽⁸⁾.

The divorce rates have increased considerably during the recent last years not only in developed but developing countries as well. It has been often overlooked but it has certainly changed the family structure due to its pervasive destructive effects on the society ⁽⁴⁾.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study aims to:

- (1) Assess the level of psychological distress among divorced women in Baghdad.
- (2) Find out the significant relationship between psychological distress and some variable such as: age, educational level, having children, number of children, custody of children and period of divorce.

METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional descriptive study carried out for the period from 2nd May to 30th November, 2015 in which assessment approach is applied in order to achieve the earlier stated objectives of the study. A sample of 50 divorced women is selected purposively (non probability sample) who were attending the social welfare department at the local municipal council in Al-Sadir city in Baghdad, Al-Rasafa sector. The permission has been granted from District Officer of Al-Sadir city.

A semi-structured questionnaire was used by the investigators for the present study. The researchers were adapting Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) ⁽⁹⁾. The questionnaire comprised of two parts: the first contained the socio-demographic characteristic of the divorced women; the Second contained the items that measure psychological distress. These items were rated to five levels of likert scale and scored the follows: none of the time (1), a little of the time (2), some of the time (3), most of the time (4), and all of the time (5).

The data have been collected through the utilization of the self administrative questionnaire as a mean of data collection except for those who can not read and write in which the researchers were aiding in filling the questionnaire. Most of the respondents were cooperative and willing to participate in the study. The consumed time for filling the questionnaire was 15-30 minutes.

Statistical analyses were conducted by using statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 15.0. Data analysis was employed through the application of descriptive and inferential statistical approaches which were performed through the computation of the following: frequencies, percentages, means of score, standard deviations, and Chi-square.

The present study has much delimitation that may be influence the findings and results. These delimitations were represented by selected sample that may be not represented, because only one setting was used for choosing the sample. In addition, a little variable has been included in the study.

RESULTS

Table 1. Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Sample

No.	Characteristic	F	%
1	Age:		

	≤ 19 year	5	10
	20 – 29 year	19	38
	30 – 39 year	13	26
	40 – 49 year	9	18
	50 year ≤	4	8
	Total	50	100
2	Educational Level		
	Don't read & write	5	10
	Read or write	16	32
	Primary/Secondary school	24	48
	Institution/College	5	10
	Total	50	100
3	Having Children		
	Yes	37	72
	No	13	26
	Total	50	100
4	No. of Children		
	No Children	13	26
	1 – 3 children	26	52
	4 – 7 children	11	22
	Total	50	100
5	Custody of Children		
	Yes	32	64
	No	18	36
	Total	50	100
6	Divorce Period		
	≤ 1 year	13	26
	2 – 4 year	25	50
	5 ≤ year	12	24
	Total	50	100

No: Number, F: Frequency, %: Percentage

Table (1) reveals that 38% of divorced women were in age group of (20-29 year) old, with educational level of primary/secondary school (48%), 72% of them were having 1-3 children, 52% of them were responsible for custody of their children, half of the sample showed that they get divorced for the period of 2-4 years (50%).

Table 2. Psychological Distress among Divorced Women

Psychological Distress Level	F	%	M.S	S.D
Low	0	0		
Moderate	23	46		
High	27	54	2.54	0.503
Total	50	100		

F: Frequency, %: Percentage, M.S: Mean of score, S.D: Standard deviation

Table (2) indicated that more than half of divorced women experiencing moderate to high level of psychological distress (54%).

Table 3. The Relationship Between Psychological Distress and Socio-demographical Characteristics.

Dependant	Chi-square	d.f	P-Value ≤ 0.05	Significance
Independent				
Age	63.169	56	0.238	N.S
Education	63.302	56	0.234	N.S
Having Children	12.145	14	0.595	N.S
No. of Children	30.635	28	0.334	N.S
Custody of Children	14.410	14	0.420	N.S
Divorce Period	35.397	28	0.159	N.S

d.f: Degree of freedom, P: Probability, NS: Not Significant

Table (3) revealed that there is no significant relationship between psychological distress among divorced women and their socio-demographic characteristics at p-value= 0.05.

DISCUSSION

It has been known out of the analysis in table (1) reveals that the divorced women were fall in the age group of (20-29 year) old, and have primary or secondary educational level, most of them were having 1-3 children, who were responsible for custody of their children, the divorce period of them was 2-4 years. The age group of divorced women reveals the failure of the marriage relationship which is related for both the wife and husband, especially the philosophy of our society in which there are many reasons may lead to early divorce. In general the result of age group indicates the early divorce can be due to many causes such as: marriage at adolescent age, inappropriate choosing of the other, cultural and thought immaturity, absence of sexual orientation, infidelity, misunderstanding by family members and so on. All of these can explain the early age of divorced women. The educational level of the sample may indicate the incompatibility between couples which lead at the end to divorce. The number of children and custody of children indicate that women are more responsible than men to care with their children if we consider the structure of the family in our societies which focus on men as a responsible figure in the family system structure. On the other hand the result above may indicate the emotional status of the divorced in which they reject to loss their children, and then they request to be custodial of their children. A study presented supportive evidence to this result that found Sharma in his study ⁽⁴⁾.

In table (2) the result indicated that more than half of divorced women experiencing moderate to high level of psychological distress. This result could be explained by the

living ways for those divorced women who are in front of the burdens after divorce. According to our culture, the first traumatic experience for divorced women is the stigma made by public toward them; this negative view is considered as an important impact on the psychological aspect of them. In addition to stigma, the divorced women will have many problems representing by loss of their children and lack of financial status. All these may reflect the psychological problems of divorced women. Many studies found that after divorced, the women will experiencing more psychological problems such as depression and anxiety. A study presented supportive evidence to this result was found Trivedi et al. who found that divorced women have more psychological stressors which effect on mental health status⁽⁷⁾.

Te findings in table (3) revealed that there is no significant relationship between psychological distress socio-demographic characteristics of the sample. The findings above is came to be against the hypothetical questions of the researchers in which it is hypothesized that there is a significant relationship between psychological distress and the other variables. However, there are many points that could provide us with an explanation. Age and education will make no difference among divorced women, if we consider the causes of divorce that sometimes and some of them request for divorce for many reasons and the education doesn't reflect their coping and adaptation abilities. In addition, the emotional factor is playing an important role; the women will turn her attention on the caring of their children who are custody of them. A study presented supportive evidence that found Mohammed ⁽¹⁰⁾ who found that there is no significance relationship between psychological factor and sample's characteristics. Additional support was by Sharma ⁽⁷⁾. The current findings were slightly different from the findings of Husain et al. who found significant relationships between psychological distress and age and education among the sample ⁽¹¹⁾.

CONCLUSIONS

Divorce is highly prevalent in women less than 40 years old. The divorced women experiencing moderate to severe psychological distress. The psychological distress among divorced women is doesn't influenced by their age, education, having children, custody of children and period of divorce.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Emphasis on the role of media to improve the public attitude toward the concept of divorce and its negative effects on the women and family.
2. Emphasis on the Governmental role towards divorced women and their children through social insurance and provide adequate housing.
3. Providing social services, recreational, and rehabilitative programs for divorced women to improve their quality of life.

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