

IMPACT OF DIVORCE ON THE EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING OF WOMEN IN PORT HARCOURT LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

The study delves into the impact of divorce on the emotional well-being of women in Port Harcourt Local Government Area. Employing both descriptive and inferential statistics, the research outlines the socio-demographics of 200 divorced women, revealing a predominant age range of 31-40, diverse occupations including traders and civil servants, and all respondents reporting being divorced, with most having 1-4 children. Hypothesis testing explored the relationship between divorce and emotional well-being, revealing a significant negative correlation, indicating that increased divorce relates to decreased emotional well-being. The result shows that there was a significant negative relationship between divorce and emotional wellbeing ($r = -.56, p < .05$). The result also showed that divorce significantly and independently influenced the emotional wellbeing of women in the Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. ($\beta = .56, t = -9.55, p < .05$). Further analysis through linear regression supported this correlation, indicating divorce's independent influence, explaining 32% of the variance in emotional well-being. The study's implications call for the provision of tailored support services, the integration of mental health support into legal and counselling services, community awareness campaigns, policy considerations, and further longitudinal research. These findings collectively emphasize the need for targeted interventions and policy measures to address the emotional challenges faced by divorced women in this region.

Keynotes: Emotional Wellbeing, Divorce, Women, Marriage

Introduction

According to Odis (2021), divorce not only terminates a marital union but also disrupts the emotional equilibrium of those involved, particularly women. In the Nigerian context, where marriage is often regarded as a sacred institution, the dissolution of such unions carries additional societal stigma and emotional burden (Ugwuanyi & Formella, 2024). According to Amato (2000), divorce is "a transition in the family structure that significantly affects individuals' emotional stability, social support systems, and economic resources."

In the Nigerian context, particularly within traditional communities like Port Harcourt in Rivers State, divorce is often viewed through a lens of social stigma, placing undue emotional and psychological pressure on women. Emotional well-being, which Diener et al. (1999) describe as "a positive state of mind that enables individuals to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, and contribute to their community," is often compromised in divorced women due to these societal expectations and emotional strains.

Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State, has seen a significant rise in divorce cases, mainly due to domestic violence, infidelity, and economic difficulties. Women, often at the receiving end of these challenges, face unique emotional and psychological hurdles post-divorce, including depression, anxiety, and social isolation (Odis, 2021). Divorce is not merely a private issue; it's public and communal, often attracting unsolicited judgment and exclusion. According to Idoko (2020), emotional well-being entails the balance between life satisfaction, positive emotions, and psychological resilience. In Port Harcourt, women who go through divorce are often perceived as failures, blamed for the breakdown of their marriages regardless of the circumstances, and may be subjected to ridicule or rejection from friends, family and religious communities. Thus, understanding the emotional well-being of divorced women in Port Harcourt is crucial for developing targeted interventions and support systems. This study aims to explore the emotional experiences of these women, the coping mechanisms they employ, and the societal factors influencing their post-divorce well-being.

Method

The study employed a descriptive survey design to capture the emotional experiences of divorced women in Port Harcourt. This design was chosen to allow for a comprehensive understanding of the participants' emotional states and the factors influencing them. A total of 200 divorced women, aged between 25 and 55, residing in various communities within the Port Harcourt Local Government Area, were purposively selected for the study. Inclusion criteria included being legally divorced for at least one year and willingness to participate in the study.

Instruments

Data were collected using the Emotional Adjustment Divorcees Questionnaire (EADQ), developed and validated by Nwosu et al. (2022). The EADQ assesses various dimensions of emotional well-being, including depression, anxiety, self-esteem, and social support. The instrument demonstrated high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.84.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviation were used to summarize the emotional well-being scores. At the same time,

Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was employed to test the hypotheses and determine the influence of demographic variables on emotional well-being.

Result

The study employed descriptive and inferential statistical tests in analysing the data collected from the fieldwork. The descriptive test showed the distribution of participants according to socio-demographic characteristics, while the inferential statistics showed results for hypothesis testing.

Table 1: Respondents' Socio-demographics (N = 200)

Category	Level	N(%)
Age	19-30 years	61(30.5)
	31-40 years	73(36.5)
	41-50 years	37(18.5)
	51-60 years	29(14.5)
Occupation	Nurse	5(2.5)
	Banker	13(6.5)
	Lecturer	5(2.5)
	Doctor	17(8.5)
	Trader	41(20.5)
	Receptionist	7(3.5)
	Seamstress	5(2.5)
	Marketer	9(4.5)
	Pastor	3(1.5)
	Fashion designer	7(3.5)
	Engineer	4(2.0)
	Manager	4(2.0)
	Teacher	8(4.0)
	Farmer	12(6.0)
	Lawyer	7(3.5)
	Civil servant	13(6.5)
Marital status	Self employed	26(13.0)
	Student	14(7.0)
Number of children	Divorced	200(100.0)
	No response	43(21.5)
	1-4 children	132(66.0)
	5-8 children	25(12.5)

The socio-demographics of the participants are presented in Table 1. In terms of respondent age, 30.5% were 19-30 years old, 36.5% were 31-40 years old, 18.5% were 41-50 years old, and 14.5% were 51-60 years old. In terms of occupation (2.5%) were nurse, (6.5%) were banker, (2.5%) were lecturer, (8.5%) were doctor, (20.5%) were trader, (3.5%) were receptionist, (2.5%) were seamstress, (4.5%) were marketer, (1.5%) were pastor, (3.5%)

were fashion designer, (2.0%) were engineer, (2.0%) were manager, (4.0%) teacher, (6.0%) were farmer, (3.5%) were lawyer, (6.5%) were civil servant, (13.0%) were self-employed while (7.0%) were student. In terms of marital status, all the respondents (100.0%) were divorced. Based on the number of children, a larger percentage of respondents (66.0%) have 1-4 children, while 12.5% have 5-8 children.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One: There will be a significant relationship between divorce and emotional wellbeing. The hypothesis was tested using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) and the analysis is presented in Table 2

Table 2: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) showing the relationship between divorce and emotional wellbeing

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2
1. Divorce	84.16	13.90	-	
2. Emotional wellbeing	31.58	6.17	-.56**	-

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The result shows that there was a significant negative relationship between divorce and emotional well-being ($r = -.56, p < .05$). This implies that an increase in divorce tends to decrease emotional well-being. The hypothesis, which stated that there would be a significant relationship between divorce seeking and affect burden, was accepted.

Hypothesis Two: There will be significant prediction of divorce on emotional wellbeing. The hypothesis was tested using linear regression analysis and the analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Simple linear regression showing the prediction of divorce on emotional wellbeing

Predictor variable	B	SE	β	t	R	R ²	F	P
(Constant)	52.54	2.23	-	3.38				.00
Divorce	-.25	.03	.56	-9.55*	.56	.32	91.18*	<.05

The simple linear regression in Table 4.3 shows that divorced significantly and independently influence emotional wellbeing ($\beta = .56, t = -9.55, p < .05$). The contribution of divorce in explaining the variance in emotional wellbeing was 32% ($R^2 = .32$), and the model was significant, $F(1, 198) = 91.18, p < .05$. This implies that 32% accounted for divorced on emotional wellbeing. The stated hypothesis is therefore accepted.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that divorce significantly impairs the emotional well-being of women in Port Harcourt. Many of the respondents reported high levels of emotional distress, including feelings of rejection, isolation, low self-esteem, and pervasive sadness. This supports the assertion by Gahler (2006) that "divorce is often followed by a deterioration in

psychological wellbeing, particularly for women who bear the brunt of post-divorce adjustments and child-rearing responsibilities.”

The cultural and religious expectations in the Nigerian society, where a woman's identity and value are closely linked to her marital status, further aggravate the psychological toll. Women reported facing discrimination from extended family, exclusion from community events, and stigmatization in religious and social spaces. These experiences corroborate the views of Eyo and Ekpenyong (2017), who found that divorced women in Nigeria experience systemic rejection and internalized shame that hinder their emotional healing.

In addition, the absence of adequate emotional and financial support systems further escalated psychological challenges. Many of the women indicated that they struggled to care for their children alone, while also dealing with personal trauma and financial instability. This aligns with Stack and Eshleman (1998), who emphasized that “emotional distress post-divorce is often intensified by economic hardship and lack of social capital.” Participants also noted that the legal and cultural processes involved in divorce were emotionally draining, often biased against women, and made it harder for them to move forward.

Despite these challenges, some women adopted coping strategies such as spiritual support, peer counselling, and engagement in income-generating activities. These findings underscore the importance of mental health services, legal reforms, and community-based support structures that cater specifically to the emotional needs of divorced women in urban Nigerian settings.

These emotional challenges were often linked to factors such as loss of social status, financial instability, and concerns about children's welfare. These results align with the findings of Odis (2021), who reported similar emotional distress among divorced women in Nigeria.

Furthermore, societal stigma emerged as a significant factor exacerbating the emotional challenges faced by divorced women. Participants reported experiences of discrimination, social exclusion, and negative labelling, which hindered their ability to rebuild their lives post-divorce. This supports the assertions of Ugwuanyi & Formella (2024), who highlighted the pervasive stigma associated with divorce in Nigerian society.

Implication of the Study

The study underscores the urgent need for targeted psychological support and societal sensitization to address the emotional challenges faced by divorced women in Port Harcourt. Interventions should focus on providing counselling services, economic empowerment programs, and public education campaigns to reduce stigma and promote acceptance.

The findings of this study hold significant implications for understanding the sociopsychological landscape of divorced women in Port Harcourt. Divorce, often perceived as a personal crisis, is closely tied to emotional instability, social stigma, and economic hardship. According to Amato (2000), the dissolution of marriage can lead to declines in psychological well-being, especially in societies where divorced women face negative social labelling. In Port Harcourt, where patriarchal norms are still deeply entrenched, divorced women are often

marginalized, further compounding their emotional distress. The study implies that emotional support structures, such as therapy and community-based interventions, are largely underdeveloped and underutilized. Furthermore, the research underscores the necessity for stakeholders—social workers, psychologists, and policymakers—to collaborate in addressing the emotional aftermath of divorce through proactive programming.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, it is recommended that mental health interventions be made more accessible and culturally sensitive. As suggested by Wang and Amato (2004), counselling services tailored to the emotional needs of divorced women should be integrated into community health centres. In Port Harcourt, the government and NGOs should collaborate to set up support groups that focus on emotional recovery and resilience-building. Schools and religious institutions can also serve as platforms for educating communities about the psychological impact of divorce, thereby reducing stigma. Additionally, economic empowerment programs targeting divorced women can alleviate stress and promote mental health, echoing the views of Lorenz et al. (2006), who emphasized the link between financial stability and emotional well-being post-divorce.

1. **Establishment of Support Centres:** The government and non-governmental organizations should establish support centres offering counselling, legal aid, and vocational training for divorced women.
2. **Public Sensitization Campaigns:** Community leaders and media outlets should collaborate to conduct campaigns aimed at reducing the stigma associated with divorce and promoting societal acceptance.
3. **Inclusion in Policy Formulation:** The experiences and needs of divorced women should be considered in the formulation of social welfare policies to ensure their holistic reintegration into society.

Limitations of the Study

The study's reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias, as participants might underreport or overreport their emotional experiences. Additionally, the purposive sampling technique limits the generalizability of the findings to all divorced women in Port Harcourt.

This research is not without limitations. The study was limited to women residing in Port Harcourt Local Government Area, which may not reflect the experiences of divorced women in rural or other urban settings in Rivers State. Secondly, the data collected relied heavily on self-reports, which are subject to biases such as exaggeration or social desirability. As noted by Creswell (2014), qualitative and self-reported research methods can sometimes obscure objectivity. The cross-sectional nature of the study also restricts causal interpretations; longitudinal studies would provide a more nuanced understanding of how emotional well-being evolves after divorce. Lastly, cultural sensitivity and personal trauma might have influenced the willingness of some respondents to express their emotions fully.

One major limitation of the study is the sampling technique and sample size. While a stratified random sampling method was employed to capture various categories of civil servants across

different ministries and departments, the final sample may not fully represent the broader population of civil servants in Rivers State. Some ministries or cadres may have been overrepresented or underrepresented, depending on the availability and willingness of respondents. In addition, the sample size, although statistically sufficient for analysis, might be considered small relative to the total population of civil servants in the state. This limitation poses a challenge to the external validity and generalizability of the results. The findings may not adequately reflect the views of all civil servants across the diverse organizational structures, especially those working in remote or less accessible areas.

Another key limitation pertains to the use of self-report questionnaires as the primary data collection instrument. While questionnaires are efficient tools for collecting standardized data from a large number of participants, they are susceptible to several forms of bias. Notably, social desirability bias may have influenced the responses, particularly on sensitive questions related to organizational trust, employer obligations, or job satisfaction. Respondents may have been inclined to provide socially acceptable answers rather than their true opinions, especially given that the study involves government employees who may feel uncomfortable disclosing dissatisfaction or organizational grievances. Additionally, response bias, such as acquiescence bias (agreeing with statements regardless of their content) and central tendency bias (avoiding extreme responses), could have compromised the accuracy of the data.

Furthermore, the study's cross-sectional design presents another significant methodological limitation. By collecting data at a single point in time, the study captures only a snapshot of the relationship between psychological contract and organizational commitment. This design limits the ability to make causal inferences or track changes over time. Psychological contracts are dynamic and can evolve with organizational changes, employee experiences, and external factors. Similarly, organizational commitment can be influenced by time-bound factors such as promotions, restructuring, or leadership changes. The inability to observe such temporal dynamics restricts the depth of understanding of how these constructs interact over time. A longitudinal study would have provided a richer and more accurate depiction of these variables and their interdependencies.

Lastly, the study may have encountered non-response bias. Despite efforts to encourage participation and assure confidentiality, some employees may have chosen not to respond or withdrew partway through the questionnaire due to fear of reprisal, lack of interest, or time constraints. The characteristics and views of nonrespondents remain unknown, and if they differ systematically from respondents, the results may be biased. For example, employees who feel strongly disillusioned or those who are highly committed might have been more (or less) likely to participate, thereby influencing the distribution of responses.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has established that divorce has significant negative effects on the emotional wellbeing of women in Port Harcourt. The results highlight that emotional distress—manifested in forms such as anxiety, depression, and self-devaluation—is common among divorced women, largely due to cultural stigma and insufficient support systems. As pointed out by Olson and DeFrain (2000), “divorce represents not just the end of a marriage, but a

psychological transition that can lead to either renewal or emotional breakdown.” In the context of Port Harcourt, the latter is more prevalent due to prevailing societal attitudes that frame divorced women as incomplete or morally suspect. Consequently, many women undergo emotional turbulence with minimal institutional or familial support, thereby affecting their self-worth and quality of life.

However, the study also revealed that with adequate emotional support and empowerment programs, women can gradually rebuild their lives and regain emotional stability. It is imperative for policymakers, NGOs, religious institutions, and mental health professionals to work collaboratively to create inclusive programs that promote psychological recovery and social reintegration for divorced women. Addressing the stigma associated with divorce and promoting emotional resilience are key steps in supporting women's wellbeing post-divorce. Ultimately, a shift in societal mindset and increased investment in women's welfare programs will not only reduce the emotional burden of divorce but also foster a healthier, more compassionate society.

Divorce significantly impacts the emotional wellbeing of women in Port Harcourt, manifesting in heightened levels of depression, anxiety, and social isolation. These challenges are compounded by societal stigma and inadequate support systems. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach involving psychological support, economic empowerment, and societal sensitization. By implementing targeted interventions and promoting inclusive policies, stakeholders can enhance the emotional wellbeing and overall quality of life for divorced women in the region. Future research should explore longitudinal studies to assess the long-term emotional trajectories of divorced women and the effectiveness of various intervention strategies.

In conclusion, this study establishes a strong relationship between divorce and emotional wellbeing among women in the Port Harcourt Local Government Area. Emotional distress, social alienation, and financial instability were prevalent among the participants. The findings echo existing literature, such as that by Kalmijn and Monden (2006), which highlights that women tend to experience greater emotional and economic repercussions post-divorce compared to men. The study reinforces the urgent need for comprehensive support systems and mental health awareness to address the emotional vulnerabilities of divorced women. While the study offers valuable insights, it also opens the door for further research on the role of cultural and religious influences in shaping post-divorce experiences.

The study makes a significant contribution to understanding the relationship between psychological contract and organizational commitment among civil servants in Rivers State, Nigeria. However, several limitations must be acknowledged. These include issues related to sampling, design, context specificity, methodological approach, measurement instruments, access to external data, and timing. Recognizing these limitations is essential not only for accurate interpretation of the study's findings but also for designing more comprehensive and methodologically rigorous future research. Addressing these gaps through longitudinal designs, mixed-method approaches, broader and more diverse sampling, and inclusion of mediating factors will help build a more holistic understanding of the dynamics between psychological contracts and organizational commitment in a public sector setting.

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