



## An exploration of the psychosocial challenges faced by women following divorce in Mvuma Ward 14

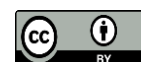
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### ABSTRACT

*This study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the psychosocial challenges experienced by divorced women in Mvuma, Zimbabwe. The study adopted the Biopsychosocial theoretical framework to explore the psychosocial challenges faced by women following divorce in one of the mining areas in Zimbabwe. Qualitative research methods were employed to explore the psychosocial challenges faced by women following divorce. Purposive sampling was employed to select twelve divorced women and two key informants such as community leaders. Divorce is recognised as severely disrupting individuals' established identities, roles and support systems, with women usually bearing disproportionate burdens. However, limited existing research from Zimbabwe necessitated primary data collection through in-depth and key informant interviews to examine challenges that surfaced through women's narratives. Findings highlighted that divorced women in Mvuma face significant psychosocial challenges, including loss of identity and self-esteem, stigma and societal judgment, parenting challenges, co-parenting dynamics, and emotional distress. The study also identified coping mechanisms employed by these women, such as seeking professional assistance, developing support networks with other divorced women, and investing in personal growth. Furthermore, the study suggests interventions to address the psychosocial needs of divorced women, including enhancing community support groups, enhancing co-parenting skills, and providing education and awareness campaigns. Recommendations underscore the need for holistic, community-driven healing avenues like bolstering counseling accessibility and peer support. Policy emphasis on fostering amicable divorces, upholding women's rights and crafting rehabilitation schemes for single parents merits attention.*

**Key Words:** coping mechanisms, divorce, psychosocial challenges, women



## INTRODUCTION

There is growing global interest in understanding the causes and multifaceted consequences of marital dissolution, particularly its psychological and social impacts on women who undergo divorce (Asfaw & Alene, 2023; Ottakkam-Thodukayil et al., 2025). Divorce is widely recognised as one of the most emotionally-challenging life events, with far-reaching implications for personal identity, mental health, and social stability. In many Western societies, although divorce has become increasingly normalised, it still carries considerable emotional and psychological burdens. Research conducted in these contexts has shown that women tend to experience greater levels of emotional distress, including depression, anxiety, and diminished self-worth, particularly in the early stages following marital dissolution (Al-Shahrani & Hammad, 2019; Kołodziej-Zaleska & Przybyła-Basista, 2016). Moreover, the transition from married life to singlehood often results in social isolation and a breakdown in support systems, which further exacerbates psychological vulnerabilities.

In the African context, the implications of divorce are deeply rooted in socio-cultural

traditions where marriage is often regarded not only as a union between individuals but as a vital alliance between families and communities (Pio et al., 2021). Divorce, therefore, is viewed not simply as a personal matter but as a disruption to social cohesion and community order. Traditional African values prioritise marriage as a lifelong institution, and divorce is often discouraged or stigmatised, especially for women. As a result, divorced women may encounter significant societal judgment, loss of social status, and diminished support from extended family networks (Emery, Sbarra & Grover, 2005; Diala, 2018). Unlike Western societies where formal support structures may be more accessible, divorced women in African settings often lack institutional mechanisms to support their emotional, financial, and social recovery. This difference underscores the importance of localised, culturally-informed research on the lived experiences of divorced women in African societies.

Focusing specifically on Zimbabwe, the family unit remains the foundational structure for socialisation, economic security, and emotional well-being. However, divorce in Zimbabwe is frequently associated with societal stigma and gendered disadvantage. Research has shown that women bear the

brunt of the consequences following divorce, including economic hardship, loss of child custody, and social alienation (Mehari, 2013; Makara, 2009). The cultural framing of divorce as a moral failure, especially on the part of women, often leads to their marginalisation within both family and community settings. Furthermore, the legal and social processes surrounding divorce in Zimbabwe tend to inadequately address women's emotional and psychological needs, thereby compounding the psycho-social impact. While there is a significant body of research focused on children's well-being post-divorce and the legal dimensions of marital dissolution, there is a notable gap in studies specifically examining the psycho-social challenges faced by divorced women, particularly in rural or resource-constrained communities.

This study seeks to address that gap by exploring the psychosocial impacts of divorce on women in Mvuma, Zimbabwe. It builds on existing literature by contextualising the lived experiences of divorced women in a sociocultural and economic environment where divorce is still heavily stigmatized. The study explores not only the emotional and psychological toll of divorce but also the broader social

challenges, including stigma, isolation, and the breakdown of social support networks. By doing so, this research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how divorced women navigate the complex realities of life after marital dissolution in Zimbabwe and underscores the need for gender-sensitive support systems and policy interventions.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study's objectives were to:

1. Examine the psychosocial impacts of divorce on women in Mvuma, by exploring the interrelation of psychological, social, and economic factors.
2. Identify strategies that could enhance the well-being and resilience of divorced women in resource-constrained communities.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopted the Biopsychosocial model to explore the intricacies associated with psychosocial challenges faced by women following divorce. The Biopsychosocial model provides a comprehensive framework for

examining the psychosocial challenges women face after divorce, as it considers the interconnected biological, psychological, and social factors that influence health and well-being (Engel, 1977). Originally developed by George Engel, this approach analyses the limitations of the traditional biomedical model, emphasising the need to account for the broader complexities of human experience (Marschall, 2023). In the context of divorce, the Biopsychosocial model allows for a deeper exploration of the multifaceted factors that contribute to the psychosocial difficulties women often encounter. Biological factors, such as physical health issues, hormonal changes, and the impact of stress on the body, can be significant contributors. For instance, women reported experiencing physical symptoms of stress, including sleep disturbances, fatigue, or chronic illness, exacerbated by the emotional strain of the divorce process (Suls & Rothman, 2004).

Psychological factors are equally important, as divorce often triggers a range of emotional and mental health challenges. Feelings of loss, anxiety, depression, and a decline in self-esteem are common responses that can impact women's overall mental health and coping abilities (Engel, 1977). Divorce may

also challenge their sense of identity and disrupt previously stable routines, leading to long-term emotional difficulties. Coping strategies, whether adaptive or maladaptive, play a critical role in how women adjust to the changes in their lives, influencing their psychological resilience in the aftermath of divorce.

Social factors, which Engel (1977) emphasises as vital to understanding health, involve the broader societal and cultural context in which women live. Divorce often results in shifts in social roles and relationships, including family dynamics, changes in support networks, and the stigma surrounding divorce in certain communities. These social elements can significantly impact women's psychosocial well-being, as they may face economic hardships, diminished social support, or challenges in accessing resources needed to rebuild their lives (Suls & Rothman, 2004). By applying the Biopsychosocial model, the study can offer a holistic view of the psychosocial challenges women encounter following divorce. It enables an in-depth analysis of how biological stress responses, psychological coping mechanisms, and social contexts interconnect to shape women's

health and well-being during this difficult life transition.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts the qualitative research approach to explore the psychosocial challenges faced by women following divorce in Mvuma. The qualitative approach was the most appropriate for this research as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences, emotions, and perspectives of divorced women, as well as insights from key informants such as marriage counselors and community leaders (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2018). Qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews and key informant interviews, were selected to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the complex psychosocial issues faced by women after divorce.

## **DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND SAMPLING**

The primary data collection methods used in this study were in-depth interviews and key informant interviews. These methods were chosen because they allow for the collection of rich, detailed data that can provide a nuanced understanding of the

psychosocial challenges experienced by women following divorce (Cresswell, 2013). The interviews were conducted using in-depth interviews, with open-ended questions designed to encourage participants to share their experiences and insights freely. This approach enabled the researcher to probe deeper into specific issues and capture the complexity of the participants' psychosocial experiences. The researcher developed a carefully-crafted interview guide, which was used for both the in-depth interviews with divorced women and the key informant interviews with marriage counsellors and community leaders. The questions were open-ended to allow for detailed responses and to elicit a wide range of perspectives on the psychosocial impacts of divorce. Key areas explored in the interviews included emotional responses to divorce, coping mechanisms, the role of community support, and the broader social and cultural implications of divorce in the Mvuma Ward 14 context.

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants for the study. According to Bryman (2016), purposive sampling allows the researcher to target individuals based on specific characteristics relevant to the study. In this case, the sample consisted of divorced

women who had experienced the psychosocial challenges of post-divorce life. Additionally, marriage counsellors and community leaders were interviewed to provide further insight into the social and cultural factors that influence the experiences of divorced women in the community. The inclusion of these key informants allowed the study to capture diverse perspectives on the issue, enriching the analysis.

A total of 14 participants were selected for the study, including 12 divorced women and 2 key informants (a marriage counsellor and a community leader). The sample size was determined based on data saturation, the point at which no new information or themes emerged from the interviews (Saunders et al., 2018). This ensured that the study gathered sufficient data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the psychosocial challenges under investigation. To ensure the trustworthiness and rigour of the study, several strategies were employed. First, triangulation was achieved by collecting data from multiple sources — divorced women, marriage counsellor, and community leaders. Second, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants to ensure the accuracy of the data interpretation (Stake, 2010). Third, the

researcher maintained a reflexive journal to account for any biases or assumptions that could influence the data analysis process. These measures contributed to the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the study's findings.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher followed Braun and Clark's six stages of data analysis from generating codes defining themes and up to the writing up phase (Braun & Clark, 2006). Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected from the interviews. This method involves identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. After transcription of the interviews, the researcher familiarised himself with the data, coded them according to recurring themes, and organised them into meaningful categories related to the psychosocial challenges faced by divorced women. Key themes included emotional responses to divorce, coping mechanisms, social support, and cultural perceptions of divorce in the Mvuma community. These themes were then analysed in relation to the study's research questions and objectives.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Prior to the commencement of the study, the researcher sought ethical clearance and permission from relevant authorities, including local leadership and institutional review boards. The ethical approval ensured that the study complied with established research standards and protected the rights and well-being of all participants. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose and objectives, and informed consent was obtained before data collection. Participants were also assured of their anonymity, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of their participation. To ensure participants anonymity and privacy, the researcher used pseudonyms to report findings

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The study had 14 participants, consisting of 12 divorced women between the ages of 18 to 33 years and two key informants. However, there was no limit to the age range as long as the women fitted the inclusion criterion, which was being divorcees. Half of the women (6 out of 12) had attained secondary education, while two had some tertiary education and one admitted that she was still attaining

tertiary education. Half of the participants (6) reported that they were formally employed, while the other 6 were not formally employed at the time of the interviews. In terms of religious beliefs, half of the participants identified themselves as Christians, while three of them noted that they believed in the African Traditional Religion (ATR). Two participants were Muslims, while one participant was not aligned to any religion.

The two key informants were a 43-year old male Headman of the area who had secondary education and had been in the position for over 15 years, and a 42-year-old female marriage counsellor with training college qualifications and over 10 years of experience counselling couples and families in the ward. Interesting findings from this research show that at least five women were formally employed, while 7 were not formally employed. While the economy might be a factor leading to divorce, common reasons were found to be Gender-Based Violence, infidelity and economic challenges

**Table 1: Demographic Description of Participants**

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Level of Education</b>	<b>Reason for Divorce</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Number of Children</b>	<b>Employment status</b>
<b>Chireshe</b>	18	Grade 7 (Primary)	Infidelity	ATR	1	Working
<b>Tendai</b>	24	Form 4 (Secondary)	Domestic violence	Christianity	2	Not working
<b>Tanaka</b>	22	Tertiary (Still attending)	Unknown	None	2	Working
<b>Nyasha</b>	27	Degree	Infertility	Moslem	0	Working
<b>Tino</b>	26	Form 2 (Secondary)	Economic Instability	Christianity	3	Working
<b>Wedzerai</b>	27	Form 4 (Secondary)	Unknown	Christianity	1	Not working
<b>Tatenda</b>	28	Form 4 (Secondary)	Domestic Violence	Christianity	3	Not Working
<b>Mazvikanda</b>	29	Form 5 (Advanced)	Infidelity	Moslem	No	Not working
<b>Chawapiwa</b>	30	Diploma	Infidelity	Christianity	No	Not working
<b>Tafadzwa</b>	33	Form 3 (Secondary)	Domestic violence	ATR	4	Working
<b>Anotidaishe</b>	23	Degree	Unknown	ATR	2	Working
<b>Kudzainashe</b>	19	None	Married another wife	Christianity	0	Not working

In line with the objectives of this paper, themes from this study are presented under two broad themes: Psychosocial challenges of divorced women, and Coping mechanisms.

## **PSYCHOSOCIAL CHALLENGES OF DIVORCED WOMEN RESIDING IN MVUMA**

### **EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES**

The findings revealed that women in Mvuma's Ward 14 face significant

emotional challenges following divorce, with low self-esteem, stress, and anxiety emerging as dominant issues. Many of the participants reported a profound sense of identity loss, which had been closely tied to their roles as wives and mothers. Four women explained how these roles had defined them for many years, and in their absence, they felt unanchored and uncertain about who they were. This emotional turmoil was compounded by the verbal and emotional abuse they endured during their marriages, which left lasting damage to their self-worth. For example, participants recounted how their ex-husbands' constant belittling of them made them feel inadequate and incapable, instilling a deep sense of self-doubt that persisted post-divorce.

Tanaka, one of the participants, poignantly expressed her emotional struggle, stating:

*I feel like I have lost myself after the divorce. Being a wife and mother was my whole identity, and now I do not know who I am anymore. I used to have a purpose, but now I feel empty and lost. It is like I have to start all over again, but I do not even*

*know where to begin.*

Tendai echoed similar sentiments, describing how her ex-husband's constant criticism had left her emotionally scarred:

*My ex-husband always made me feel worthless and like I could not do anything right. After years of hearing those negative things, it is hard not to believe them. I doubt myself constantly now and question my abilities. It is a constant battle to regain my self-esteem and believe in myself again.*

A key informant, a marriage counsellor, confirmed these patterns, emphasising that many divorced women internalize these negative messages. They struggle to reclaim their confidence and require support to rebuild their self-worth. The counsellor noted:

*Many divorced women I work with experience a deep loss of self-esteem and confidence. They internalise the negative messages from their ex-spouses and struggle to rebuild their*

*sense of self-worth. It is important to provide them with support and empower them to discover their identities outside of their previous roles. Helping them recognise their strengths and value is crucial for their healing and rebuilding their self-esteem.*

These accounts underscore the emotional toll divorce takes on women in this community. Their distress is not only rooted in the personal upheaval of ending a marriage, but is also intensified by societal expectations and rigid traditional gender roles, which equate a woman's value with her marital status. As a result, many women face emotional isolation, self-doubt, and psychological trauma. These findings are consistent with existing literature. Jaure (2021) observed similar experiences among divorced women, citing the loss of identity and diminished self-esteem due to emotional abuse and societal stigma. Budgeon (2016) highlights how traditional gender norms complicate the process of self-redefinition outside of marriage.

This emotional distress aligns with the Biopsychosocial model, which considers how biological, psychological, and social factors collectively shape an individual's

experience. The psychological pain — manifested as low self-esteem, anxiety, and stress — is exacerbated by the social pressures of conforming to rigid gender norms and the internalised trauma from marital abuse. These emotional challenges may also have biological consequences, affecting overall mental health and well-being. Therefore, empowering women through psychosocial support and societal change is critical to promoting healing and emotional resilience.

## **SOCIAL CHALLENGES**

The findings from this study revealed that divorced women in Mvuma Ward 14 face numerous social challenges, particularly relationship difficulties, social isolation, stigma, and discrimination. Participants consistently reported experiencing societal judgment and a sense of exclusion following their divorces. Many noted that community members viewed them as failures or morally compromised, leading to feelings of shame and rejection. This social stigma created barriers to building new relationships, accessing support systems, and reintegrating into community life. As a result, several participants reported withdrawing from social spaces to avoid gossip and criticism, which only deepened their isolation.

Kudzainashe shared her painful experience, stating:

*After my divorce, I felt like everyone was judging me. People treated me differently, as if I was a failure or had done something wrong. It was so hurtful and made me feel ashamed. I started to isolate myself because I did not want to face the judgment and gossip.*

Similarly, Chawapiwa lamented the persistent cultural taboos surrounding divorce, saying,

*It is frustrating how divorce is still seen as a taboo in our society. No matter the reasons behind it, we are automatically blamed for the breakdown of the marriage. People do not understand the pain and challenges we go through. Instead of support, we face judgment and criticism.*

A key informant (marriage counsellor) supported these concerns, explaining that societal stigma undermines women's emotional well-being and discourages them from seeking help:

*Divorced women often face significant stigma and judgment from their*

*communities. This can have a profound impact on their self-esteem and ability to seek support. They lose a sense of belonging in the community. Therefore, it is important for society to recognise that divorce is a complex and personal experience, and to offer understanding and empathy instead of judgment and stigma.*

These findings clearly indicate that social stigma surrounding divorce in Mvuma contributes to a cycle of social alienation and emotional distress. Women are not only judged but also blamed for their marital breakdowns, regardless of the actual circumstances. The resulting shame and isolation interfere with their ability to form new social relationships or access community resources. According to the local headman, this social rejection significantly hinders their reintegration and healing processes.

The social challenges experienced by the women in this study align with existing literature. For instance, Amato (2017) observed that divorced women, particularly in conservative communities, often face harsh societal judgment that results in feelings of shame and exclusion. Likewise, a study by Williams and Umberson (2019) found that divorced women frequently encounter discrimination and relationship

difficulties stemming from cultural expectations and stigma, which further contribute to social isolation. These studies affirm that social attitudes play a central role in shaping the post-divorce experiences of women and can hinder their recovery and reintegration.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings are consistent with the biopsychosocial model, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of biological, psychological, and social dimensions in human experiences. The stigma and societal judgment reported by participants manifest as psychological challenges (shame, self-doubt, emotional withdrawal) and social difficulties (isolation, discrimination, disrupted relationships). These, in turn, can lead to biological consequences, such as increased risk of depression and anxiety. Therefore, addressing the social challenges of divorced women requires not only individual counselling but also community-level interventions aimed at challenging discriminatory norms, fostering empathy, and promoting inclusivity.

## PARENTING CHALLENGES AND CO-PARENTING DYNAMICS

The study found out the challenges faced by divorced women in parenting and co-parenting after divorce in Mvuma's Ward 14. Six of the participants noted the challenges which include difficulties in maintaining consistent parenting styles, conflicts with ex-spouses in decision-making, balancing emotional needs, and shouldering financial responsibilities alone. These findings emphasise the complexities and obstacles that divorced women navigate in their parenting roles. One of the participants (Wedzerai) highlighted that,

*Co-parenting has been incredibly challenging for me. My ex-spouse undermines my authority with the children and constantly creates conflicts in decision-making. It is difficult to establish consistent parenting styles when we have such different approaches. It creates confusion and stress for the children, and it is a constant battle to maintain a healthy co-parenting dynamic.*

In support, Mazvikanda also shared that,

*Being a single parent after divorce is emotionally draining. I have to navigate my own healing process while also being there for my children. It is challenging to balance their emotional needs with my own, and sometimes I feel overwhelmed. I want to provide a stable and nurturing environment for them, but it is not always easy when I am still healing.*

In corroboration, the KII expressed that,

*Co-parenting after divorce can be extremely challenging. It requires effective communication, compromise, and putting the needs of the children first. Many divorced women struggle with maintaining consistent parenting styles and managing conflicts with their ex-spouses. It is important to provide them with support and resources to navigate these challenges and create a healthy co-parenting dynamic for the well-being of the children involved.*

Therefore, findings revealed the significant challenges faced by divorced women in parenting and co-parenting

after divorce. These challenges include difficulties in maintaining consistent parenting styles, conflicts with ex-spouses in decision-making, balancing emotional needs, and shouldering financial responsibilities alone. The complex nature of co-parenting dynamics can create stress and confusion for both the women and their children. These findings underscore the need for support and resources to help divorced women effectively navigate these challenges and establish healthy co-parenting relationships. The findings are in sync with other recent studies which noted that women face difficulties in maintaining consistent parenting styles, managing conflicts with ex-spouses, balancing emotional needs, and shouldering financial responsibilities alone (Jaure, 2021; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020).

As such, these findings emphasise the need for support, resources, and guidance to help divorced women effectively navigate these challenges and establish healthy co-parenting relationships. Additionally, the findings of this study are in line with the biopsychosocial model, as the challenges faced by divorced women in parenting and co-parenting can be seen

through this lens. Biologically, the stress and emotional toll of navigating these challenges can impact mental health. Psychologically, the difficulties in maintaining consistent parenting styles and managing conflicts can create emotional strain. Socially, the financial responsibilities and co-parenting dynamics can affect social support networks and relationships.

### BEHAVIOURAL CHALLENGES

The study also revealed that in response to emotional distress, some divorced women in Mvuma develop behavioural challenges that pose serious threats to their health and well-being. These include substance abuse, disordered eating, withdrawal from social life, and, in severe cases, suicidal ideation or attempts. The participants' narratives indicated that such behaviours often emerged as coping mechanisms to deal with the overwhelming emotions following divorce, particularly when access to psychological or social support was limited.

One participant, Linda, shared her struggle with unhealthy eating patterns, stating:

*After my divorce, I stopped caring*

*about what I ate. Some days I wouldn't eat at all, and other days I would binge. It was like I was trying to fill a void or punish myself. I lost so much weight and started getting sick, but I didn't care at the time.*

Another participant, Netsai, revealed how emotional distress led her to engage in excessive alcohol consumption:

*I started drinking more than I used to, just to sleep or numb my feelings. I felt like no one understood me, and drinking became my escape. But it made things worse. I became more isolated, and my relationship with my children also suffered.*

The marriage counselor interviewed as a key informant confirmed these behavioural patterns:

*Many divorced women develop harmful coping strategies such as substance abuse or withdrawal from social life. Some even talk about suicidal thoughts when they feel overwhelmed and unsupported. These behaviours are a cry for help. We need to create safe spaces where*

*women can talk about their pain  
without fear of judgment.*

These findings suggest that behavioural challenges among divorced women are often rooted in unresolved emotional distress and compounded by a lack of supportive structures. The absence of mental health interventions and culturally-appropriate psychosocial support systems further exacerbates these behaviours, making recovery difficult. The withdrawal from social spaces, self-neglect, and maladaptive coping mechanisms are not just signs of distress but indicators of a broader issue involving emotional trauma and social abandonment.

This aligns with existing literature. According to Jackson and Rodgers (2022), divorced women are at a higher risk of developing maladaptive behaviours such as disordered eating and substance use due to psychological strain and social stigma. Similarly, Taylor et al. (2021) found that behavioural health challenges, including suicidal ideation, are more prevalent among women who lack post-divorce support systems and face societal rejection. Both studies emphasise that untreated emotional distress often manifests in self-destructive behaviours, reinforcing the need for targeted

mental health interventions and community support.

The behavioural challenges identified in this study also resonate with the Biopsychosocial model, which highlights how biological, psychological, and social factors interact to shape individual behaviour. Psychologically, emotional trauma and unresolved grief can lead to harmful behaviours. Socially, isolation, stigma, and lack of community support reinforce these behaviours. Biologically, substance abuse and disordered eating can affect physical and mental health, contributing to a cycle of deterioration. These findings underscore the urgent need for early intervention, therapeutic support, and community education to prevent long-term behavioural issues among divorced women in Mvuma and similar contexts.

### **COPING MECHANISMS EMPLOYED TO ADDRESS PSYCHOSOCIAL CHALLENGES POST-DIVORCE SEEKING PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE**

The study found that some women in Mvuma's Ward 14 sought professional assistance, such as counselling, as a coping mechanism to address the psychosocial challenges they faced after

divorce. In most of the interviews with the participants, they expressed that these services have been beneficial in providing a safe space to express their emotions, receive guidance, and develop coping strategies. For instance, Tino was grateful for the counselling sessions she has been attending for three months. She expressed that,

*Attending counselling sessions has been a crucial part of my healing process after divorce. It provided me with a safe space to express my emotions, process my grief, and develop coping strategies. My therapist has been a guiding light, helping me navigate the challenges and uncertainties of life after divorce.*

Tafadzwa also narrated the benefits of such sessions in her life, noting that,

*Therapy has been a game-changer for me in managing the anxiety and co-parenting challenges. It gave me the tools and insights to improve my well-being and develop effective strategies to communicate and co-parent with my ex-spouse. My therapist has*

*been a source of support and guidance, helping me find my strength and resilience.*

As such, the findings emphasise the significance of seeking professional assistance, such as counselling, as a valuable coping mechanism for divorced women in Mvuma's Ward 14. Participants highlighted the benefits of these services in providing a safe and supportive environment to express emotions, process grief, and develop effective coping strategies. According to them, professional assistance plays a crucial role in helping women navigate challenges such as anxiety, co-parenting dynamics, and rebuilding self-esteem. Therefore, these findings underscore the importance of accessing professional support to address the psychosocial challenges faced by divorced women, providing them with guidance, tools, and empowerment to heal, grow, and enhance their well-being.

Findings from this research highlighted that counselling is helpful in providing a safe and supportive space for emotional expression, processing grief, and developing effective coping strategies, which resonates with other studies (Harrop et al., 2020). The findings are in

line with the Biopsychosocial model, as seeking professional assistance as a coping mechanism for divorced women relates to all three dimensions of the model. Biologically, accessing counselling or therapy can have positive impacts on mental health and overall well-being. Psychologically, it provides a supportive space for emotional expression, processing grief, and developing coping strategies. Socially, it connects women with trained professionals who offer guidance, support, and resources to navigate the challenges of divorce.

### **DEVELOPING SUPPORT NETWORKS WITH OTHER DIVORCED WOMEN**

The study revealed that developing support networks with other divorced women has been crucial for women in Mvuma's Ward 14. During the interviews, all the women noted that joining support groups and connecting with other divorced women provided solace, understanding, and a sense of belonging. These networks, according to the local KII, offered valuable advice, emotional support, and empowerment through shared experiences. Participant Chireshe noted the benefits of such, indicating that,

*Joining a support group for divorced women was a game-changer for me. I found solace and understanding from others who had gone through similar experiences. We shared our stories, offered advice, and provided emotional support to one another. It was a safe space where I felt understood and validated.*

In support of this, Kudzainashe also highlighted that,

*Connecting with other divorced women has been so important for me. They understand the unique challenges we face and can offer valuable insights and encouragement. We share our triumphs and struggles, and it's empowering to know that I am not alone in this journey.*

KII confirmed that,

*Support networks with other divorced women has played a vital role in post-divorce recovery. These connections provide a safe space for sharing experiences, finding understanding, and*

*receiving encouragement. Therefore, it is empowering to see these women uplift and support one another, creating a community that fosters resilience and growth.*

Therefore, the accounts above underscore the importance of developing support networks with other divorced women in Mvuma's Ward 14. Participants highlighted the value of joining support groups and connecting with individuals who have experienced similar challenges. According to the local KII, these networks provided solace, understanding, and a sense of belonging, allowing women to share their stories, offer advice, and provide emotional support. More essentially, the connections formed with other divorced women empowered participants, reminding them that they are not alone in their journey. Therefore, these findings emphasise the significance of building support networks to navigate the post-divorce period, fostering resilience, and promoting personal growth. Jean-Berluche (2024) also emphasises that building connections with individuals who have experienced similar challenges provides solace, understanding, and empowerment. Additionally, the findings

of this study are consistent with the Biopsychosocial model, as developing support networks with other divorced women relates to all three dimensions of the model. Biologically, these connections can provide emotional support and alleviate stress, positively impacting mental health and overall well-being. Psychologically, the understanding and empathy received from others who have shared similar experiences can foster a sense of belonging and promote emotional resilience. Socially, these networks provide a supportive environment and a sense of community, addressing the social needs of divorced women.

## **INVESTING IN PERSONAL GROWTH**

The findings highlighted that investing in personal growth has been one of the significant coping mechanisms employed by women in Mvuma's Ward 14 after divorce. During interviews, 6 of the participants expressed that they have pursued further education, engaged in personal development workshops, and explored new hobbies and interests to enhance their self-esteem, rediscover their strengths, and find personal fulfillment. According to the marriage counsellor, investing in personal growth empowers

divorced women to rebuild their lives, expand their opportunities, and find a sense of purpose beyond their previous marital roles. Sharing her experiences, Tatenda noted that,

*Pursuing further education after my divorce was a turning point for me. It allowed me to regain confidence in my abilities and opened up new career opportunities. Investing in my personal growth helped me redefine myself and feel a sense of achievement and fulfillment.*

In addition, Tafadzwa also expressed that,

*Attending personal development workshops and engaging in self-reflection exercises helped me rediscover my strengths and set new goals for myself. It was a transformative journey of personal growth. I learned to embrace my individuality and take charge of my own happiness and fulfillment.*

This was also echoed by Kudzainashe, who narrated that,

*After my divorce, I decided to explore new hobbies and interests*

*that I had always been curious about. Painting and practicing yoga became my outlets for self-expression and personal growth. These activities not only helped me find joy and fulfillment but also provided a sense of peace and balance in my life.*

The KII also expressed that,

*Investing in personal growth has been a powerful coping mechanism for some of the divorced women here. It has empowered them to rebuild their lives, expand their horizons, and find a sense of purpose beyond their previous marital roles. In engaging in activities that promote self-reflection, skill development, and exploration of new interests, women can discover their strengths, enhance their self-esteem, and create a fulfilling life after divorce.*

The above narratives highlight the significance of investing in personal growth as a coping mechanism for women after divorce in Mvuma. Participants emphasised pursuing further education,

engaging in personal development workshops, and exploring new hobbies and interests as means of rebuilding their lives and finding personal fulfillment. Investing in personal growth empowered these women to rediscover their strengths, expand their opportunities, and redefine themselves beyond their previous marital roles. This coping mechanism not only enhanced their self-esteem and confidence, but also provided a sense of purpose and fulfillment in their post-divorce journey. The findings underscore the importance of self-reflection, skill development, and exploring new interests as essential components of personal growth for divorced women, promoting their overall well-being and personal satisfaction.

Further to that, the findings are in line with existing literature on the importance of investing in personal growth as a coping mechanism for women after divorce. For instance, a study by Anderson (2015) highlighted the transformative power of pursuing further education, engaging in personal development activities, and exploring new interests in post-divorce life. The findings are also in line with the Biopsychosocial model, as investing in

personal growth speaks to all three dimensions of the model. Biologically, engaging in personal growth activities can enhance self-esteem and contribute to overall well-being. Psychologically, it empowers individuals to rediscover their strengths, develop a sense of purpose, and enhance their psychological resilience. Socially, investing in personal growth can lead to expanded social networks, increased opportunities, and a sense of belonging.

## **STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS**

The study's strengths lie in its focused population and context-specific approach. By targeting a small sample of 12 women in Mvuma, the research allowed for an in-depth exploration of their psycho-social experiences following divorce. This localised focus provides rich, qualitative data that reflects the unique challenges these women face. Additionally, the study's emphasis on local governance highlights the socio-political structures that impact divorced women, contributing valuable insights for local policy discussions. The small sample size also facilitated a more personal understanding of each participant's experiences, offering a nuanced perspective

that may be underrepresented in current literature.

However, the study also had several limitations. The small sample size, while beneficial for depth, limits the generalisability of the findings to a broader population. The focus on Mvuma restricted the geographical scope, making the results less applicable to women in different regions, particularly in urban areas. Cultural biases might also have affected the findings, as the psychosocial challenges observed might not translate to women from different cultural backgrounds. Additionally, concentrating solely on local governance might have overlooked the influence of broader legal and political systems. Finally, the reliance on self-reported data could have introduced biases, as participants might have been reluctant to share personal details or might not have fully recalled their experiences accurately.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study explored the psychosocial challenges faced by divorced women in Mvuma, examining the coping mechanisms employed by these women, and providing key insights into potential community interventions

that could be adopted to address their psychosocial needs. Through qualitative interviews with divorced women of varied backgrounds as well as input from key community stakeholders, the study gained an understanding of the experiences, perspectives and needs of this vulnerable population. The comprehensive findings revealed that divorce takes a significant toll on women's identity formation, self-esteem and mental health. Trying to establish a sense of self outside of their defining marital and maternal roles while also battling the lasting effects of potential belittlement from their ex-spouses leaves many struggling with their self-worth and direction in life. Additionally, navigating the emotional turmoil of intense feelings like grief, loneliness, anger and anxiety presents immense psychological challenges. Socially, they face stigma, judgment and distancing even from those close to them. Moreover, parenting alone amidst such distress poses difficulties as co-parenting dynamics also undergo immense strain.

The study highlighted the importance of seeking professional assistance, developing support networks with other divorced women, and investing in personal growth as

effective coping mechanisms. These mechanisms empower divorced women to rebuild their lives, enhance their self-esteem, and find personal fulfillment. The findings of this study contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the experiences of divorced women, emphasising the need for a holistic approach that addresses the biopsychosocial dimensions of divorce. The study's results resonate with the Biopsychosocial model, which acknowledges the interplay between biological, psychological, and social factors in shaping an individual's experiences.

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