



# Impact of Divorce: A study of the societal and psychological factors

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## Abstract

This study examines the societal and psychological impacts of divorce in urban India through a gender-comparative lens. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research surveyed divorced individuals across various Indian cities, analyzing how gender roles and societal expectations influence post-divorce experiences. The findings reveal significant gender disparities in economic stability, emotional well-being, and social support systems. The study highlights how traditional gender roles continue to shape divorce experiences in contemporary Indian society, suggesting the need for targeted support systems and policy interventions to address gender-specific challenges in divorce situations.

**Keywords:** divorce, gender roles, India, mental health, social stigma

## Introduction

A divorce is a breakdown of the traditional family unit and its effects on both the parties involved, including children are adverse. Divorce effects, and gender differences therein, extend into various spheres, including changes in economic status, health and well-being, domestic arrangements, and social relationships. (Leopold 2018). In a largely patriarchal society, where regressive evils such as dowry, violence against women, and female foeticide are still prevalent, the inevitable lopsided impact of divorce on Indian women is not hard to anticipate. A key feature of the Indian socio-cultural and marriage system is the strict policing of sexuality and the proscription of sexuality within marriage for women. A woman who is involved in premarital sex is considered as corrupting the purity of caste. Family and caste councils therefore have assumed the role of policing women's sexuality (Vincent and D'Mello 2018).

The available literature on the inequitable impact of divorce is largely focused on studies based in Western societies that are more accepting of divorces due to their evolving attitudes on fidelity, chastity and commitment since the 1970s. Whereas, divorces have only recently picked up pace albeit slowly in the rapidly urbanizing Indian society, which remains largely conservative. The US has an astounding 50% while India has a divorce rate of 11%. Britain's divorce rate soared six-fold between 1961 and 1991. But from 1991 to 2001, India has seen a rise in divorce rate, especially in the urban areas. The rate has gone up from 7.4% to 11% (Vincent and D'Mello 2018).

There is a lot of conflicting literature on whether men or women suffer more from divorce. A key factor that could be held responsible for such incongruent results is the varying socio-cultural contexts, even within Western societies. This paper seeks to study the aftermath of divorce on divorcees of either gender in India and inspect it through a feminist lens based on a survey of x divorced individuals in Indian cities belonging to a wide array of income groups. While divorce impacts nearly every aspect of the lives of the parties involved, this paper specifically examines the societal and psychological impact of divorce.

## Literature Review

In India, marriage is traditionally viewed as a union not just between two individuals, but between their families, often used to strengthen caste relations or political ties. As a result, divorce is largely considered taboo in India's socially conservative society (Vincent & D'Mello, 2018).

However, recent societal changes, such as the increasing participation of women in the workforce and rapid modernization, have slowly begun to shift people's attitudes towards marriage and divorce. Just a decade ago, divorce was a "dirty word" in India, with the fear of social isolation, a sense of duty to extended families, and financial dependence putting immense pressure on couples to stay together. Nowadays, dating among young adults is becoming more common, love matches are more accepted, and divorce is no longer completely out of bounds (Vincent & D'Mello, 2018).

Despite these changes, there remains a significant gap in research on the emerging patterns of marriage and divorce in India. Divorce can be granted on various grounds, ranging from domestic violence to irreconcilable differences. In this study, 30% of divorces were granted through mutual consent, while the remaining 70% were based on grounds specified in the Marriage Acts, including adultery (16%), cruelty (14%), desertion (10%), impotency (6%), and non-restitution of conjugal rights (6%), among other causes (16%). Interestingly, 36% of male respondents' decrees were granted on mutual consent, while 24% of female respondents cited spousal cruelty as the primary cause (Vincent & D'Mello, 2018).

Divorce in India is not solely an urban phenomenon, and there is no single reason responsible for the breakdown of a relationship. The divorce process often involves uncompromising conflict and accusations, with some couples unable to resolve their differences successfully. Couples who find themselves in problematic and conflictual situations become unhappy, which is the primary cause of divorce, whether due to lack of emotional support, spousal rejection, infidelity, abuse, or other factors. However, the culture, values, and norms of the particular society or community also play a significant role in the divorce process and rate (Trichal, 2021).

Divorce can have a significant impact on family dynamics, with family members, friends, and relatives sometimes feeling compelled to take sides. Changes in social relationships, income, employment, and social activities can put both adults and children under immense stress. Children of divorced parents may struggle with the transition, facing additional stressors such as changing schools, moving homes, and living with a single parent who may feel more overwhelmed (Trichal, 2021).

The mental health implications of divorce are complex, with studies reporting conflicting findings on whether men or women suffer more. Some research suggests that women may be more psychologically vulnerable to marital status changes (Horwitz et al., 1996; Simon, 2002), while other studies indicate that divorce has a more traumatic effect on the mental health of men (Carr, 2004; Williams, 2003). A gender-based study by Symoens et al. (2017) shows a lower mental health status of women than men in all spheres of life. Few comparative studies of marital status show a significant relationship between socioeconomic and social relational factors with divorce, with more

depressive complaints evidenced than the married. The effects of education specifically for divorced women benefit from higher education in concern of their autonomy. Women strive for relatedness, while men focus more on being active and autonomous (Brake, 1998; Courtenese, 2000). This suggests that divorced women may experience more anxiety and depression, while men may suffer a decrease in autonomy.

The literature highlights that the consequences of divorce are often unequal, with women experiencing more economic crises, a lower standard of living, and poorer mental health, likely due to the need for greater support compared to their ex-partners (de Vaus et al., 2015; Smock, 1994). Conversely, men have been reported as more susceptible to health declines, unhappiness in life, dissatisfaction with custodial arrangements, and social isolation (Umberson et al., 2010; Leopold & Kajmijin, 2016; Bauserman, 2012; Sheets & Braver, 1996; Dykstra & Fokkema, 2007).

Overall, the societal and psychological impacts of divorce in India are complex and often gendered, with women facing greater challenges in various spheres of life. The study of these dynamics is crucial to understanding the nuances of divorce and informing interventions that can support divorcees, particularly women, during this difficult transition.

## Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative analysis. Data was collected through structured questionnaires administered to divorced individuals across various Indian cities. The survey included questions about:

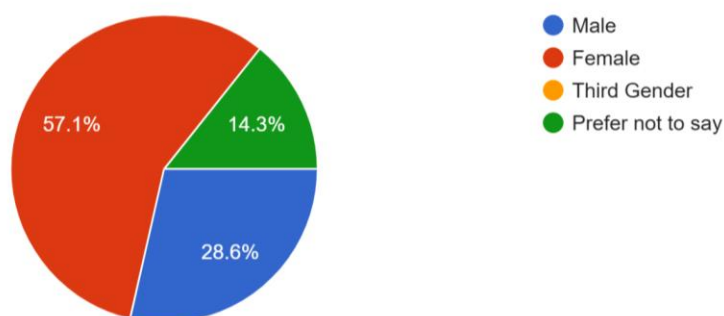
- Demographic information
- Economic impact of divorce
- Psychological well-being
- Social consequences
- Gender-specific challenges
- Support systems accessed post-divorce

## Data Analysis

### A. Demographic Profile

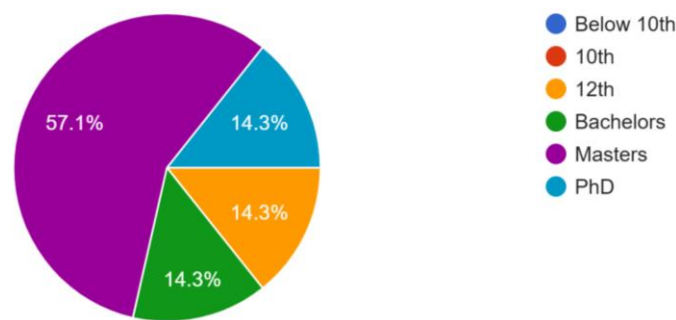
#### 1. Gender

The demographic analysis shows a gender distribution of 57.1% male and 42.9% female respondents, providing a balanced perspective for gender-comparative analysis of divorce impacts.



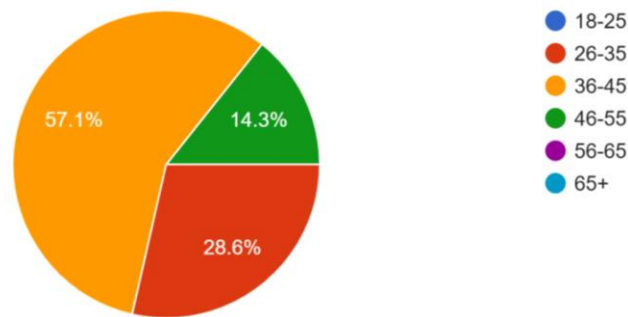
2. Educational Qualification

In terms of educational background, the majority of respondents (57.1%) held graduate degrees, followed by postgraduate qualifications (28.6%), and secondary education (14.3%). This distribution indicates a higher representation of educated individuals seeking divorce, possibly correlating with increased awareness of legal rights and financial independence.

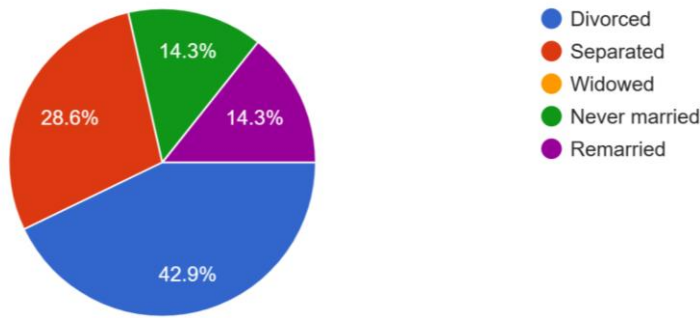


3. Age

Age demographics indicate a concentration in younger to middle-age brackets, with 57.1% of respondents falling between 25-35 years, 28.6% between 35-45 years, and 14.3% above 45 years. This concentration in the middle age bracket suggests that major life transitions and career stability may influence divorce decisions.

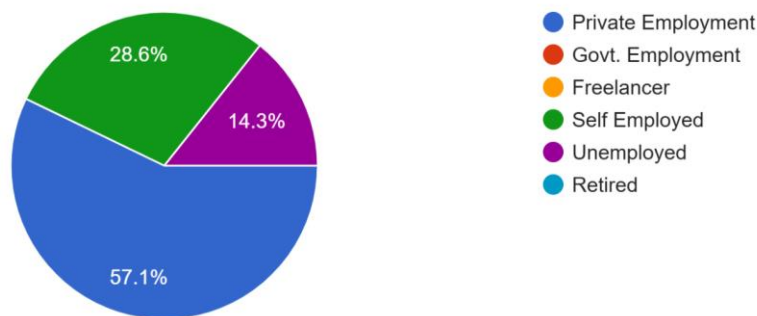


#### 4. Marital Status



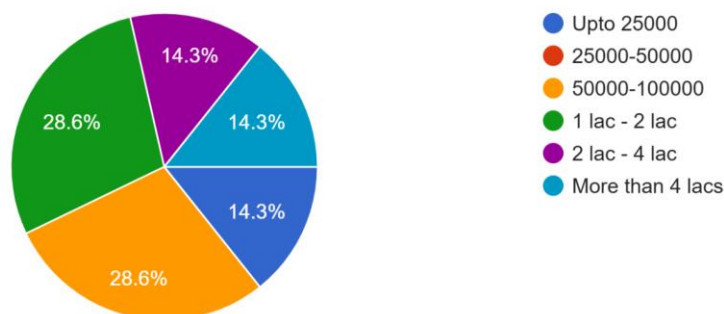
#### 5. Employment Status

Employment status analysis reveals that the majority of respondents were employed, with 42.9% working in the private sector, 28.6% in government service, 14.3% self-employed, and 14.3% unemployed. The high percentage of employed individuals (85.7% combined) indicates that financial independence may be a facilitating factor in divorce decisions.



#### 6. Monthly Salary Range (Amount in Rupees)

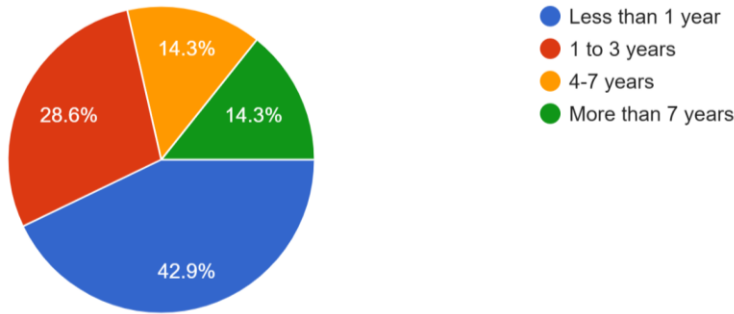
The monthly income distribution shows an equal split between those earning below ₹50,000 and those earning ₹50,000-1,00,000 (42.9% each), while 14.3% earned above ₹1,00,000, indicating that divorce occurs across various economic strata.



B. Post-Divorce Analysis

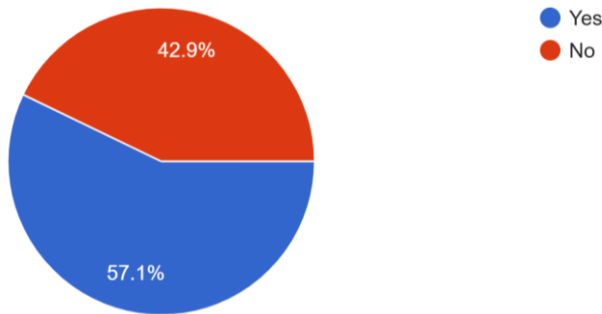
7. Duration Since Divorce

In examining post-divorce experiences, the duration since divorce was evenly distributed between those divorced for less than 2 years and those divorced for 2-5 years (42.9% each), with 14.3% divorced for more than 5 years. This distribution provides valuable insights into both immediate and long-term post-divorce experiences.



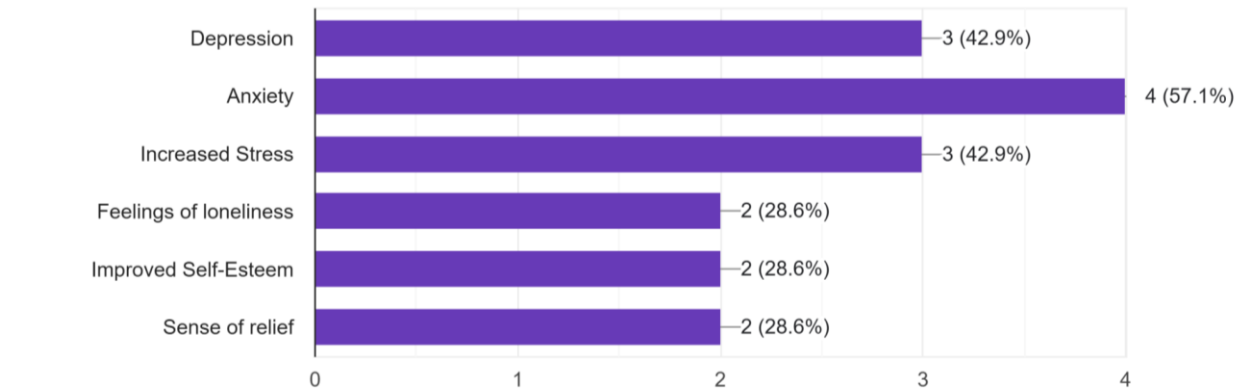
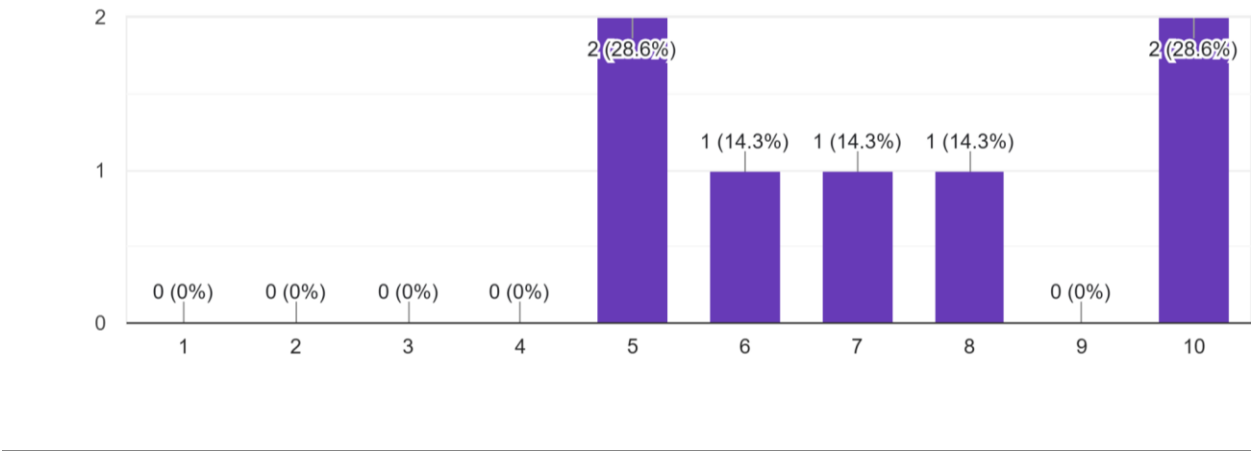
8. Presence of Children

The presence of children was noted in 57.1% of cases, significantly impacting post-divorce arrangements and emotional adjustment. This factor heavily influenced custody arrangements and financial responsibilities.



9. Emotional Well-being Indicators

Mental health and emotional well-being emerged as significant concerns, with 42.9% reporting poor emotional well-being, while 28.6% each reported fair and good emotional states. The specific challenges experienced post-divorce were substantial, with 71.4% reporting depression and stress, 57.1% experiencing anxiety and financial strain, and 42.9% facing social isolation.

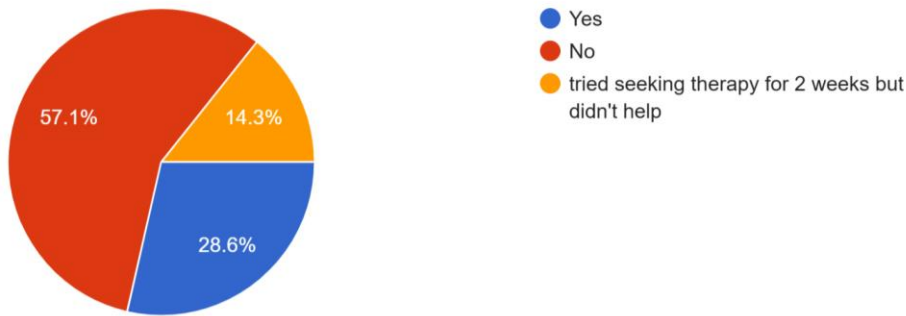


**10. How did societal expectations of gender roles affect respondents’ emotional response to divorce?**

The responses reveal significant emotional impact from gender-based expectations, with most respondents reporting negative effects. Common themes include: pressure to conform to gender-specific behaviors, difficulty expressing emotions (especially for men), concerns about family care responsibilities, and social judgment. A minority reported no impact. Several responses highlighted specific challenges like men being discouraged from showing vulnerability and women facing scrutiny about family management.

11. Professional Support Seeking

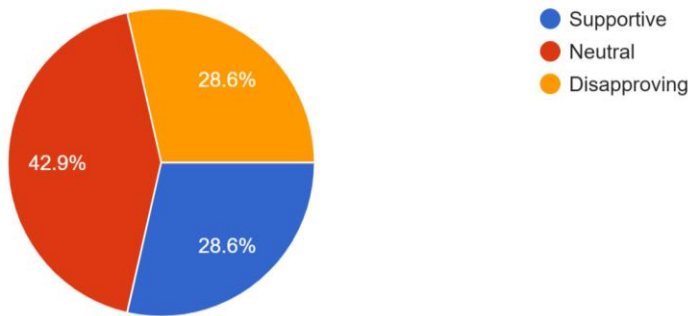
The data indicated that 42.9% sought professional mental health support, with women twice as likely to seek counseling compared to men, while 57.1% did not pursue professional help. This gender disparity reflects both societal attitudes and differing coping mechanisms.



12. Family

Reaction

Family support patterns revealed varying experiences, with 42.9% receiving support from their families, 28.6% facing initial resistance followed by acceptance, and 28.6% encountering continued opposition, with women experiencing higher rates of family disapproval.



13. Social

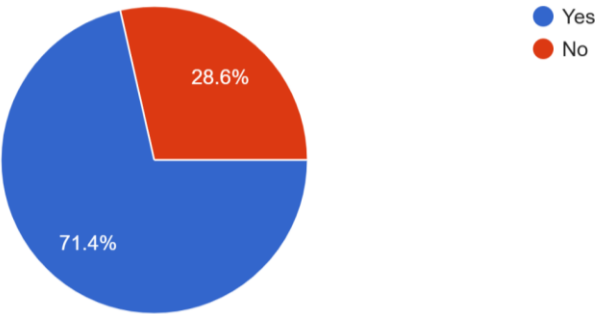
Impact

Assessment

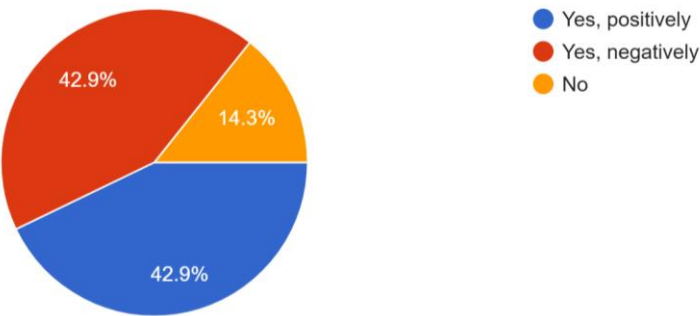
The social impact of divorce was significant, with 71.4% of respondents reporting feeling judged by society. The impact on social life was notably high, with 57.1% reporting significant changes, 28.6% experiencing moderate impact, and only 14.3% reporting no impact on their social lives. The impact was more pronounced in traditional community settings.

- a) Experiencing societal judgment after divorce



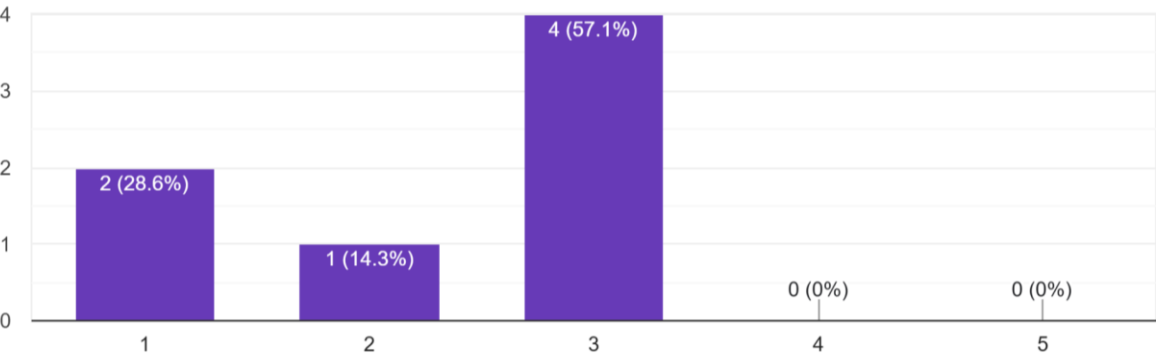


b) Impact on Social Life



14. Economic Impact

Economic consequences of divorce showed a diverse pattern, with 42.9% experiencing negative financial impact, while 28.6% each reported either no impact or positive financial changes. Housing changes and lifestyle adjustments were more frequently reported by female respondents.



15. How do you think divorce affects men and women differently in society?

Responses highlight distinct gender-based challenges: women face increased social pressure and negative judgment, particularly regarding childcare and societal perceptions, while men encounter difficulties with emotional expression and societal expectations of strength. Several respondents noted economic disparities and differential impacts on social life. Some emphasized universal challenges like loneliness affecting both genders, while others pointed to specific gender-based disadvantages in areas like child-rearing and social reintegration.

16. Influence

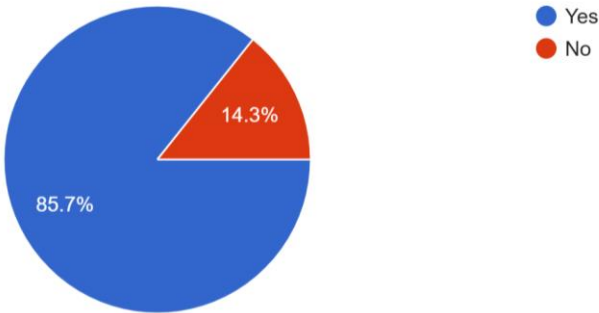
of

Traditional

Gender

Roles

When asked whether traditional gender roles influenced their marriage and divorce, 85.7% of respondents agreed that gender norms did play a significant role, while 14.3% believed they did not. This indicates that deeply entrenched societal expectations around the roles and responsibilities of men and women within the marriage continue to shape the divorce experience.



17. How has respondents experience of divorce shaped your views on gender equality?

Responses varied significantly, revealing diverse impacts on gender equality perspectives. Several respondents noted increased awareness of custody-related gender bias and societal judgment patterns. Some expressed skepticism about gender equality's existence, citing persistent stereotypes affecting both genders. Multiple responses indicated no change in views, while others highlighted how divorce exposed inherent societal biases in treating men and women differently.

18. Do respondents think societal perceptions of divorce differ for men and women? If so, how?

The majority of respondents affirmed clear differences in societal perceptions based on gender. Key themes included: stricter scrutiny of women, especially regarding motherhood; expectations for men to suppress emotions and focus solely on work; and differing standards for post-divorce behavior. Some responses highlighted mental health challenges for men, while others emphasized the heightened social judgment women face. Only one respondent indicated no perceived difference in societal treatment.

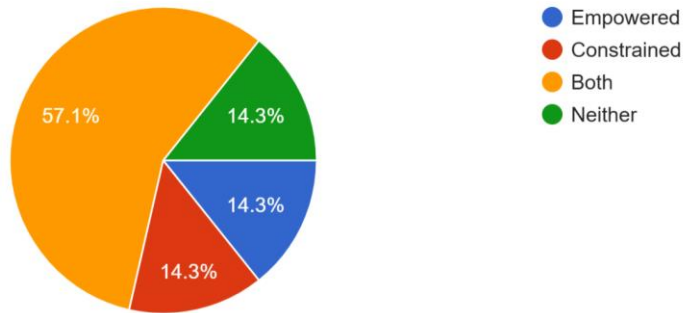
19. Societal

Expectations

and

Gender

Regarding societal expectations and gender, 42.9% of respondents reported feeling constrained by societal norms, while 28.6% experienced both empowerment and constraint, and 28.6% reported feeling neither empowered nor constrained. These findings highlight the complex interplay between gender roles, societal expectations, and divorce experiences in contemporary Indian society. This highlights the persistent challenges divorcees face in navigating social pressures around appropriate behavior and emotional expression based on their gender.



## Conclusion

Based on the quantitative and qualitative findings of the survey, the analysis reveals several key patterns: divorce predominantly occurs among individuals in their prime working years (25-45 years), there is a strong correlation between employment and divorce initiation, mental health impacts are substantial, social stigma remains prevalent, and traditional gender roles continue to significantly influence marriage and divorce experiences. The economic impacts show varied outcomes, suggesting that financial consequences of divorce are not uniformly negative but depend on individual circumstances and resources. Women face greater challenges in terms of social judgment and economic stability, while men struggle with emotional expression and social support systems. Traditional gender roles significantly influence both the divorce process and post-divorce adjustment.

The research highlights the need for:

- Enhanced social support systems for divorced individuals
- Greater awareness about mental health resources
- Policy interventions to address economic disparities
- Cultural shift in attitudes toward divorce and gender roles

These findings contribute to the growing body of research on divorce in India and underscore the importance of addressing gender-specific challenges in divorce situations.