

Post-Divorce Experiences in Jordan: A Phenomenological Perspective

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Abstract :

This study analyzes the post-divorce experiences of a sample of 50 Jordanian divorced participants. Qualitative and exploratory results are similar to the results of other studies that were conducted in certain western cultures. Similar issues included modern reasons for exiting a marriage, men's experiences of losing children and women's poor financial circumstances. Despite changes in the structure and function of the Jordanian family, post-divorce experiences continue to be influenced by the major factors of a traditional gender culture regarding the traditional reasons to exit marriage, with women retaining custody of children when they do not remarry and failure to establish cooperative custody. In addition, the results of this study reveal that progressive changes in women's choices to exit their marriages to better themselves. The study also sheds light on the perception of violence against married women as a reason for exiting marriage and family support to minimize the negative effects of divorce on women with a concurrent realization of the stigmatization of society toward divorced women. Nevertheless, additional research on this topic is needed to significantly add to our understanding of these phenomena.

Key words: Divorce, post-divorce experience, phenomenology, Jordan.

INTRODUCTION :

Jordan is a developing country located in the Middle East and is classified as an Arab country with medium human development and a Human Development Index of 0.741 (United Nations, 2016:199). Correspondingly, Jordan has achieved impressive indicators of literacy, infant mortality, and life expectancy (Alothman, 2012). However, in the last three decades Jordanian families have been facing social problems such as unemployment, poverty, domestic violence, and an increasing rate of divorce (Alothman, 2010a).

Due to modernization and globalization, traditional Arab and Jordanian families have undergone changes in the last five decades.

These changes appear to be more prominent in the structure and function of families that have transformed from being traditional to modern (Barakat 2000). The modern Jordanian family is nuclear, where parental authority is declining and the economic power of women is increasing. Despite this change in the structure of families, the relationships between nuclear and extended families indicate that traditional and modern values coexist in families and other social institutions. In addition, the modernization processes has contributed to increasing the crude divorce rate in a traditional culture such as that of Jordan. The crude divorce rate grew from 1.7 per thousand people in 2002 to 2.4 in 2013 (Department of Statistics 2013). Consequently, this rate is lower than rates for certain egalitarian cultures such as the US in 2011 (2.8) and Denmark in 2014 (3.4) and is higher than that in the UK in 2012 (2.0) and that in France in 2013 (1.9) (United Nations 2016: 841-844). Additionally, the divorce rate in Jordan is higher than certain other Arab traditional cultures such as those of Kuwait (1.9) and Egypt (2.1) in 2014 (United Nations 2016: 840,842).

Divorce is a stressful event and not only affects the couple that is directly involved but also the couple's children and families. Divorced men and women often experience painful feelings, have court appointments to settle their legal issues and are subject to financial entailments and costs subsequent to the divorce. These individuals must often find new housing or relocate and must rebuild their social relationships, eventually completely reorganizing their lives. Therefore, divorce may be considered a process, rather than an event, that has a life course that begins from the roots of the divorce and its supporting environment, followed by the divorce itself with all of its dynamics, and ends with a post-divorce stage that includes how the incident reflects on the divorced individuals, how they manage their lives accordingly, and adjust their relationships and ties with their children while facing society. The timeline of divorce processes depicts an actual "experience" that flows through time and indicates its complexities, ramifications, connections, conflicts, pains, feelings, and emotions.

The few available studies that analyze divorce in Jordan are generally preoccupied with the reasons for divorce rather than its consequences (Majali and Qaisi 2000; Ghazwi 2004; Alothman 2010). However, most prior studies regarding the reasons for divorce and its consequences are focused on western countries (Mo 2016). More specifically, prior studies regarding the aspects of divorce experiences have focused on white, middle-class participants in the United States or other egalitarian Western cultures without considering the cultural context (Chang 2003; Kitson and Morgan 1990). The discussion section of this study reviews the results of prior studies regarding the

aspects of post-divorce experiences that are related to the exploratory findings of this study.

This study explores post-divorce experiences in Jordan. Specifically, this study focuses on three primary themes that reflect post-divorce experiences from a phenomenological perspective: First, it analyzes the reflections of men and women toward their divorce in retrospect once the process is less emotional and allows us to conduct a more objective assessment regarding whether it was a rational decision, the extent to which the marriage was a failure, and whether the divorced couple considers the outcome of the divorce more positive or negative. Second, this study analyzes the couple's relationship with their children, and third, it analyzes the experiences that are relevant to society's perception and social stigma of divorced individuals.

METHODS : Qualitative Research Design

A qualitative approach was used to achieve the goals of the three primary themes of the post-divorce experiences in Jordan abovementioned. Qualitative methods assist in evaluating our subject from the perspective of participants to understand the meanings people apply to their experiences. To gain the subjective perspectives of the participants, phenomenology has been chosen as the methodology of this study (Creswell, 2007).

Consequently, this study employs two phenomenological methods. One is descriptive phenomenology which examines the subjective human experience by analyzing the descriptions that are provided by the participants, categorizes them into meaningful statements, and combines the meanings that are necessary to construct the phenomenon under study (Giorgi 2005). The other method is interpretive phenomenology which focuses on using the researchers' personal involvement in the phenomenon of interest. Notably, the researchers' experiences and biases retain a profound impact on understanding the phenomenon and its interpretation (Lopez and Willis 2004).

Participant Recruitment and Sampling Procedures

Participants

The population of the study includes divorced men and women who visited their children at the Family and Child Protection Association and the Jordanian Women's Union. Notably, the study population was dynamic in that the father or mother may have skipped the visit that the child may have attended with a family relative. The child may have been taken outside the institution for an "off-premises visit", where the father or mother does not check in with the organization. In certain cases, the visit may have been put on hold because one of the parents was away or decided not to visit.

Sampling Strategies

Purposeful sampling was utilized and official documentation revealed that 157 visits were formally registered at the two institutions when the study was conducted. The sample includes men and women who were available and agreed to be interviewed when the researchers were present at the institution. The study sample includes 21 divorced men and 29 divorced women who contributed to the data collection process in April-August 2014.

The data in Table 1 demonstrate that the majority of the participants were under the age of 45. Most of the participants made the decision to divorce during the first five years of marriage. The results reveal that divorce decreased for families with more children because the couple was more restricted in a sense that caused them to maintain their family to a greater extent. In addition, the results indicate that the income of men was greater than that of women, and all of the men were employed, while most of the women (18 of 29) were not, although they had relatively similar educational levels. This result reflects a decline in opportunities for women versus men and the subsequent income disparities.

Table 1. The characteristics of the study sample

| Females | | | | Males | | | | |
|--|------------------|---------------------|--|----------------------|--|-------------------|-------|----|
| Variable | Group | Repetition | Total | Variable | Group | Repetition | Total | |
| Age | 18-25 | 7 | 29 | Age | 25-35 | 7 | 21 | |
| | 26-35 | 15 | | | 36-45 | 8 | | |
| | 36-45 | 8 | | | 46-50 | 6 | | |
| Education Level | Primary | 3 | 29 | Education Level | Primary | 2 | 21 | |
| | Secondary | 14 | | | Basic | 8 | | |
| | Baccalaureate | 11 | | | Secondary | 2 | | |
| | Masters | 1 | | | Baccalaureate | 8 | | |
| Current Work | Working | 11 | 29 | Current Work | Working | 21 | 21 | |
| | Does not work | 18 | | | Does not work | 0 | | |
| Income | 140 | 1 | 29 | Income | 250-500 | 14 | 21 | |
| | 200-500 | 7 | | | 501-1000 | 7 | | |
| | 1000 | 1 | | Duration of marriage | | Less than a year | | 3 |
| | None | 20 | | | 1-5 years | 10 | | |
| Duration of marriage | Less than a year | 1 | 29 | Duration of marriage | | More than 5 years | 8 | |
| | 1-2 years | 10 | | | Number of children from the divorced wife | One | 13 | 21 |
| | 3-6 | 15 | | | | 2-4 | 8 | |
| | 10 | 1 | | | Are you now attached to someone else | | Yes | 16 |
| | 15 | 1 | | | | No | 5 | |
| 20 | 1 | Do you have regrets | Yes | 3 | 21 | | | |
| Number of children from the divorced husband | 1 | | 16 | Remorse for divorce | | No | 18 | |
| | 2-4 | 12 | Considered divorce a change for the better | | Yes | 18 | 21 | |
| 7 | 1 | 29 | | No | 3 | | | |
| Are you now attached to someone else | Yes | | 6 | 29 | Do you consider your divorce a change for the better | Yes | 26 | 29 |
| | No | 23 | No | | | 3 | | |

Data Collection :

This study was conducted using in-depth interviews on a person-to-person basis seeking an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of post-divorce experiences in all its dimensions (Creswell, 2007). All interviews were documented in writing.

The researchers arranged for the following procedures during the data collection process from the participants:

- Two Jordanian females' social workers were trained to collect the data under the supervision of the two researchers authoring this article.
- Official arrangements were established between the researchers and the visitation centers mentioned earlier to facilitate the mission of the researchers. Data collection began once the researchers were granted approval from the two institutions.
- Prior to commencing the interview, the researcher confirmed with the participants that their participation is voluntary and they retain the right to not be interviewed.
- The researchers reassured the participants that collected information would remain confidential and used only research purposes.

Data Analysis

We utilized the descriptive phenomenological approach demonstrated in the results and discussion sections, whereas the interpretive phenomenological approach was employed and presented in the discussion and conclusion sections. Through the following applications, the data was categorized and sorted into patterns as the primary basis for organizing and reporting the study findings:

- Methodology of reduction of the analysis of specific statements and themes (Creswell, 2007).
- Grouping relevant experiences to identify the qualitative themes of the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994).
- Synthesizing the meanings of participants' experiences of Jordanian divorced men and women (Moustakas, 1994).

RESULTS :

The analysis discusses the three major themes of the phenomenon being studied. Data from the participants was used to identify significant common experiences among divorced Jordanian men and women. We reported the analysis of the three major themes of the study according to sex as a variable presented below.

Assessing the Experience of Men with Divorce

Most men reported that their divorce decision was rational and not emotional and that their marriage was a failure. Their justifications

were often linked to certain details regarding a negative lived experience, such as a large number of marital disputes; marital infidelity; family interference, particularly by the mother and siblings; bad choices; incompatibility; and the wife's request for a divorce. For example, one of the participants stated the following: "my divorce was rational because I discovered she was cheating on me..." Another participant stated, "I made the decision to divorce after five years of futile problems that I hoped we could resolve, only to see them get worse... My marriage failed because there was no compatibility between us... I tried to resolve the dissonance without any improvement." Similarly, another participant stated, "My wife asked for a divorce and filed a lawsuit..." One participant explained, "I did all I could for three years for our marriage to succeed... but it failed because all of the problems that commenced after our marriage... She listened to her mother and sister too much."

Certain respondents considered divorce to be a solution and a life experience. One of the participants stated, "...it was rational because it solved the ongoing problems and interventions... I cannot say that it failed since everything we go through teaches us a lesson despite its harshness." Certain men that were included in the sample regarded their divorce as emotional and blamed themselves for it. Thus, one participant noted, "The divorce was emotional because I was always agitated by my financial problems, and I started taking sedatives... Frankly, I'm the one with the problem... I'm a failure and I ruined my home with my own hands." In the same context, another participant stated, "No. It was irrational, but it was imposed on me....My mistake was that I married traditionally through my uncles and I didn't feel comfortable with her..."

The men who did not remarry reported that divorce created a vacuum in their lives in terms of a lack of stability, a lack of marital responsibility, and lack of family obligations. For those who immediately remarried after their divorce, the vacuum was caused by a longing-for the children and their sense of fatherhood. Male respondents who did not remarry also shared the abovementioned feelings. Their post-divorce feelings of suffering were caused by not seeing the children, financial losses, legal troubles, and a loss of trust in women. The positive aspects of a divorce included peace of mind, the elimination of problems, and psychological relief. When asked about the outcome of the divorce in so far it is related to the abovementioned three dimensions, one of the participants stated, "...No, it did not cause a vacuum. I immediately remarried... But the children are suffering greatly especially because their mother's reputation has gone downhill... I got rid of her and I kept my children." Another participant stated, "It did not cause a vacuum

except in the beginning because my children were not around... I lost trust in women to the point where I was dismissive about remarrying... I hardly got rid of a problem that could have ruined my life completely.” Another participant explained, “It did not cause a vacuum... I remarried and was compensated for everything; thank god... it saved me from many problems.” In contrast, one of the respondents stated, “It caused a vacuum in feeling like a husband and father... I suffered great material loss and court troubles... however, now my mind is at ease.” In the same context, another participant stated, “It caused a vacuum because of my daughter... but not a wife-related vacuum... I suffered financially and psychologically... Divorce puts one at ease because it ends the injustice on both parties’ ends...” Another participant stated, “Of course it caused a vacuum... I faced lots of difficulty in court... but I am psychologically relieved of the problems.”

Assessing the Experience of Women with Divorce

As is the case with their male counterparts, women generally reported that their divorce decision was rational and that their marriage was a failure. They rationalized their divorce because they had been very patient, withstood tremendous hardships, and contemplated for a long time prior to making the decision.

The participants revealed that the rationalized principles for divorce directly intersect with the justifications used to deem the marriage a failure, which indicates a clear base of justification that is central to the divorce process for women. The justifications included difficulty in living with the husband and considering life to be hell; lack of harmony, understanding, and incompatibility; taking a period of time for reflection; a husband’s bad temper; the intrusion of the husband’s family in personal issues; and the husband’s violence.

For example, one woman stated the following, “... My divorce was rational. I waived all of my rights to get rid of him... and my marriage was a failure by all accounts. I challenged my family and I married him when his educational level was less than secondary, while I am educated with higher income. I was satisfied with that but he did not appreciate any of this.” Another participant stated, “... My life was hell. I ran away because our marriage was a failure. He only knows beating and cursing.” A third participant stated, “I kept asking for a divorce for three years but he refused... My marriage was definitely a failure since there was no common understanding. He acted irresponsibly and had a bad temper.” Another participant stated, “I was living in pain... It was a failed marriage and I couldn’t fix anything in it.” Another participant explained, “Truthfully, I worked and I tried to no avail... it was a failed marriage... there was no agreement, and the choice was wrong.” Other divorced women stated

the following, “It was an emotional decision on his end... He divorced me because of problems with his family... our marriage was a failure. We did not see eye to eye because of his problems.” In the same context, another participant stated, “Our relationship together and with our families was fine... but he was always emotional, easily agitated and upset constantly exaggerating small things... he beat me without any reason.”

The women’s statements demonstrated that their divorce created more of a vacuum for women who were home makers than for employed women. The post-divorce vacuum was related to moving away from home, losing the children or life instability. Notably, most women did not experience a vacuum as a result of their divorce. In addition, the women’s statements indicated that their suffering stemmed from being responsible for the children in the case of custody-bearing women and on being away from their children in the case of non-custody-bearing women, poor financial circumstances, how their parents and society perceived them, loneliness, restrictions on freedom that were imposed by the parents, and instability. The divorced women reported that the positive aspects of their divorce included freedom from the husband’s oppression, feeling at ease, a restoration of dignity, and retaining care of the children.

In regard to the issues that are described above, certain women stated the following, “...Sure, divorce causes a vacuum and the responsibilities diminish... After the divorce, I am bothered by how people and the family view me. He still won’t leave me alone after the divorce, falsely complaining to social services about my inability to care for the children... The only positive thing is that I regained myself and dignity.” In the same context, a participant stated, “I felt a great vacuum with the absence of my children and life stability... I suffer from loneliness and instability... To be positive though, I am relieved of his problems.” Another participant stated, “Of course it caused a vacuum in my life, and it distanced me from my son. I suffer from psychological pressure and lack of freedom... going around is restricted since everything counts against a divorced woman... There are no positive results at all.” In contrast, one participant stated, “Divorce did not cause a vacuum... On the contrary, it gave me new hope in life and gave me a chance to live and work... I suffer from the fact that my life with him is not over because we have daughter and he wants to always see her, and she is afraid of him... The divorce strengthened me and made me defend my rights... because I lived a traumatic experience... life does not revolve around marriage only.” Another participant explained, “With my children around, there is no vacuum... I do suffer from many financial problems... I spend the divorce allowance, which is not enough... I am better though... as

opposed to when he used to beat me in front of the kids, always instilling fear in them.” In contrast, one participant explained, “There is no vacuum but the absence of the children takes a toll on me... the positive thing about the divorce is freedom... I used to do what I wanted but I was under consistent psychological pressure.” Another participant stated, “It did not cause a vacuum. I was forbidden from seeing my parents... but now I go see them every day... Nonetheless, I suffer from financial problems, especially because I have a child. What is important is that I am finally relieved, and my mood has gotten better.”

Parent-Child Relationship: Men’s Experiences

The results show that most men who were not awarded custody of their children reported that their relationship with their children was adversely affected by poor communications with them, particularly if the man remarried. Poor communication minimized their contribution to their children’s upbringing although they were legally bound to finance their needs. In contrast, men who retained custody of their children experienced a change for the better because of the intense communication with them and their attempts to compensate for the absence of the mother. These fathers played a central role in raising their children and in financially providing for them. For men who retained custody of the children and remarried, the relationship with the children depended on whether the second wife accepted taking care of his children.

One of the men who gained custody of his children and remarried commented, “My relationship with the children has changed for the worse after I got remarried; they feel like they lost a mother and father... I feel that there is a great distance between us... My mother and sister take care of the kids since my second wife refused to and their mother gave them up...and her family refused to see her children for five years” Conversely, one man who retained custody of his children and remarried stated, “I became closer to my children and my relationship with them improved... The problems that used to bother them are gone...I remarried so that she can raise them. I watch them closely, and I try to raise them the best I can.” One man who did not have custody of his children stated, “...the relationship is poor... my children are with their mother and she has incited them against me to the point that they refuse to give me their phone numbers... Before we divorced she told me that you will have nothing to do with the children... I communicate with them through the visits... and I go above and beyond to give them what they want.” Another participant stated, “Of course my relationship with my child changed for the worse... I see him for five hours a week... I pay his allowance, educate him and buy him what he wants.” However, one of the men who

retained custody of his children and did not remarry said, “My relationship with the children is excellent... it has improved greatly... Of course they are in my custody and I watch them closely in everything... I did not cut them off from their mother; they see her during the visits.” Another participant stated, “The girls are in my custody... Of course this does not make up for a mother... But I do my best... Even when I’m working, I communicate with them... I will not remarry until they grow older and rely on themselves.”

Parent-Child Relationship: Women’s Experiences

The divorced women’s relationships were similar to their male counterparts; the relationships between the women and their children depended on custody and remarriage but differed because most of the women who remarried lost custody of their children. Since most women retained custody of their children, relationships with their children deepened.

One female participant stated, “My relationship with my daughter is excellent... I decided not to remarry and devote my life to her... Her father asked the court for visiting rights, which cannot prevent him from seeing her... He pays alimony, housing, and education for her... It is not enough.” Another participant stated, “My relationship with my daughter got better... I live with my parents in the same house, and they take care of all of the expenses.” Another participant explained, “Thank God I’m fine and the children are much attached to me. I am trying to make it up for them in everything... the relationship between me and them is one of friendship. I spend their alimony on me, and my brothers help me out... but the situation is difficult.” Conversely, one woman who did not retain custody of her children stated the following, “The relationship changed for the worse... They used to cry for me and they wanted me with them. I used to see them at school, but with time, their father brainwashed them, and they got used to my absence... I raised the issue in court and I started seeing them biweekly for two hours each time, but they do not interact with me and do not want to see me...” In the same context, another participant who did not retain custody and remarried stated, “My relationship with my children is bad... I remarried, and I now have a second life... this is the first time I have seen them in six years... They blame me and they say that I abandoned them... Their father played a role in preventing me from seeing them... He is raising them and is charge of them financially.”

Social Stigma Experience: Men’s Experiences

Men’s responses indicated that they did not experience a negative perception from society, nor were they embarrassed about being divorced. Most of male participants reported that divorce does not connote shame for men. However, some male participants became

less inclined to interact with society; their parents played a prominent role in determining whether the man felt that others had negative perceptions about him after the divorce.

One of the men stated, “No, there is no negative perception at all... Nothing stigmatizes a man... I remarried, thank God... Society usually blames women, and divorce has become a phenomenon.” Another participant added, “My parents were against me at the beginning but a year and a half later they are on my side despite that it bothers them.” In the same context, another participant explained, “My parents are of the type that is not in favor of divorce. But the issue had gotten out of control... my parents blame me and say that I was impatient... I tried to get her back, but her father refused...” Yet another participant stated, “My parents considered divorce a solution to our issues... They are happy that I rid myself of her, but I cut myself off from the people that I know so I don’t hear anything about it... I do not feel embarrassed, but I don’t like to discuss it... She should be ashamed.” In another context, one participant stated, “Everything has become normal these days... my family accepted the matter... but sometimes I hear things about the children and how I kept their mother away from them... I feel embarrassed of the word ‘divorcee’ because of the children, especially since I have a daughter who is about to get married... People distance themselves from her once they find out her parents are divorced... society can be ruthless by deeming divorce a catastrophe and a disaster... Other people don’t care.”

Social Stigma Experience: Women’s Experiences

Female responses are similar to the males’; divorced women did not experience a negative perception from society nor were they embarrassed by the divorce label. In addition, the role of the parents was evident in determining whether women felt a negative perception from society. The results from the study indicate that the relationship between women and society is becoming more positive and they are more accepted by society when they are liberated from a relationship that curbed their freedom.

In this regard, one of the women stated, “I did not feel that anyone perceived me negatively... Not even from my family, seeing that I rid myself of the oppression... No, I do not feel embarrassed by the word divorce... Plus, I am no longer divorced since I got remarried. I go wherever I like and attend Koranic lessons... In society, divorce is a stigma and a problem usually undealt with through expecting the woman to endure her husband’s injustice.” Another participant stated, “My parents stood with me and supported me... I behave as if nothing happened... I am not embarrassed by the word divorce since it is a legitimate right... People did not suffer what I suffered.” Similarly a participant stated, “I do not feel I am perceived

negatively... my parents wanted me to get the divorce because I suffered a lot... He kept me prisoner and forbade me from going out... I am not embarrassed of being divorced; in fact, I have become more sociable since. Divorce has become fashionable, and lots of people go through with it” One participant explained, “I am currently doing great... my family saw what occurred with their own eyes... He used to prevent me from going out even when my mom got sick. Society always wrongly stigmatizes a divorced woman and believes it’s her fault.” Conversely, one woman stated, “I suffer from a negative perception from everyone including my parents, who now treat me differently... They are not receptive to the idea of divorce and constantly accuse me of not being able to deal with matters including my home and husband... Nobody will believe that he wanted the divorce although I was very patient with him... I do not leave my parents’ house, and I do not see anyone. But when I do go on visits, my brothers accompany me... Not all people are alike... But most perceive divorce as a crime blamed on women.” Another participant stated, “My parents want me to return home. They are afraid that the children will go astray, but I don’t want to return since things have gotten better. I am not embarrassed by divorce; nonetheless, society blames women, regardless of the reasons.”

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study explored certain aspects of the post-divorce experience in Jordan, which is a traditional society that is in a transitional stage where traditional and modern values coexist. Divorce in a traditional society such as that of Jordan is a growing phenomenon and results in tremendous consequences for the couple, the children, and the image of divorced people in the community, particularly women. Few studies have analyzed divorce in Jordan (Allothman 2010).

Divorce Experience and its Roots

The results of this study clearly demonstrate that the overall post-divorce experience of the participants is negative. According to Table 1, regardless of their gender, divorced participants consider their divorce to be a change for the better and feel unrepentant about the divorce, which reflects their suffering and alienation from their former partner while reinforcing the inclination and insistence to obtain a divorce despite its painful consequences. In addition, the results of this study indicate that from the perspective of the participants, the decision to obtain a divorce was regarded as a rational one due to the failure of marriage. The results indicate that progressive change has occurred in a traditional society such as Jordan, where women consider their divorce a decision to exit their marriage and improve their lives.

The results of this study also suggest that a combination of modern and traditional reasons for divorce was reported as a justification to exit a marriage. This result is consistent with the results of similar studies that have been conducted in traditional contexts (Cohen and Savaya 2003b; Alotman 2010). The modern reasons for divorce include incompatibility and marital disputes and in general, are similar to results that have been reported for certain egalitarian cultures (Amaato and Previti, 2003; DeGraaf and Kalmijn, 2006) which reflect the transitional stage that Jordanian society is undergoing where modern and traditional values coexist. The results of this study can be explained by the effects of the modernization process in Jordan during the last five decades because the young generation is looking for more autonomy in their private life.

Divorced participants in this study experienced family interference in their marital relationships, which reflects the negative role of extended family in the life of a nuclear couple; in the past, involvement of the extended family was positive (Haj-Yahia 1995). Additionally, men rationalized the decision to obtain a divorce because of his wife's infidelity or her request for a divorce. Symbolic rationalism has emerged from social norms and its value judgments as in the case of rational separation because of marital infidelity. In a traditional society such as Jordan, the symbolic and social cost of a man to remain married greatly exceeds that of a divorce. Conversely, symbolic rationalism for women is to stay with her husband even if he cheated on her, particularly if she has children. Furthermore, the rationalization of divorce emerged through gender differentiations, particularly when the divorce was requested by the woman. This request challenges a man's masculinity and it becomes shameful for him to retain his wife. Conversely, in most egalitarian cultures, the adoption of a unilateral divorce minimizes a man's masculinity. Furthermore, the results of this study indicate that domestic violence was a traditional reason for women to request a divorce, which indicates that a progressive change has occurred in perceptions of violence against married women as a justified reason to exit a marriage. In the past, violence against married women was tolerated by the extended family and the community. For egalitarian cultures such as that of the Netherlands, prior studies incorporated variables such as infidelity or violence, which have become less relevant. In current studies, psychological and relational problems and the division of housework are more common variables used to analyze issues related to divorce (Coontz 2005; Cherlin 2009).

In a society such as Jordan, where the decision to obtain a divorce is the responsibility of the husband, the results of this study reflect the deep desire of women to obtain a divorce because they have

been patient too long and their attempts to remedy the situation, suffering, and lack of harmony failed. The prolongation of the pre-divorce period may be explained by the stigmatization of divorce in traditional societies (Cohen and Savaya 2003: 54) such as that of Jordan. In addition, women's identities are more related to their marital status (Haffey and Cohen 1992). Furthermore, social and religious norms may constrain couples' decision to divorce.

A comparison was conducted between the statements of the men and women that participated in this study. Women reported that they do not feel a vacuum in their lives when their children remain with them. However, men reported that they do not experience a vacuum when they remarry. Both male and female participants reported that they feel a vacuum because they miss their marital home and their children. These results are consistent with prior studies that analyzed egalitarian cultures, where the divorced individuals reported that their greatest loss was longing for their children (Dudley 1991; Amato and Gilbreth 1999; Albertini and Garriga 2011). The results of this study revealed that divorced women who remarry suffer from a sense of failure, guilt, and dereliction because they lost custody of their children, which led to a poor relationship with their children.

Participants of this study reported that the positive aspects of obtaining a divorce included peace of mind and putting an end to quarrels and problems. In addition, women reported that the most positive aspects of divorce included freedom from oppression, the restoration of independence and dignity, a sense of relief, and retaining custody the children. Similarly, prior studies that were conducted in egalitarian cultures reported that divorced women experienced freedom and empowerment (Bair 2007), and positive effects from the termination of their marriage (Amato 2000; Booth and Amato 2004).

Finally, the majority of women that participated in this study were unemployed and therefore, lacked power, which is why divorced women with children experience the worst financial consequences. This problem is a gendered differentiation that not only exists in Jordan but also exists in certain egalitarian societies to a certain degree (Amato 2000; Amato and Sobolewski 2004; Gadalla 2009; Ongaro et al. 2009; Amato 2014). The results of this study reinforce the results of prior studies that were conducted in egalitarian cultures. For example, numerous longitudinal studies revealed that divorce has negative economic consequences for women's income, particularly for women with dependent children in the short term (Manting and Bouman 2006; Gray and Chapman 2007; Gadalla 2009; De Vaus et al. 2014). However, the social security system plays an important role in protecting women's incomes post-divorce, particularly women with

children and continues to provide assistance for up to 6 years after a divorce in Australia (De Vaus et al. 2014). The consequences of divorce for Jordanian women may be more severe than those for women in egalitarian cultures because of greater economic hardship, the responsibility of child custody without experiencing remarriage, and social stigma.

Parent-Child Relationship

Similar to numerous egalitarian or traditional societies, the results of this study revealed that divorced fathers in Jordan seldom retain custody of their children, but most Jordanian divorced women retain physical custody of their children.

The results of this study indicate that divorce complicates relationships between nonresident fathers and their children. For fathers who retained custody of their children but did not remarry, the relationship with their children improved. Prior studies that were conducted in egalitarian cultures indicated that the biggest sacrifice for divorced men is their relationship with their children (Dudley 1991) and that the relationship between a divorced father and his children deteriorated after the divorce (Wallerstein 2009). After a divorce, children often experience a decrease in the quality and quantity of contact with their fathers (Amato 2014) and these continue to decrease over time (Baum 2003).

Most men (16 of out 21) remarried after their divorce, but most women (23 of out 29) did not (see Table 1). To clarify, remarriage after a divorce is common for men and rare for women in a traditional society such as that of Jordan. This result may have occurred because of the patriarchal traditional dominant culture, which is often biologically biased or operates separately to steer divorced women towards having custody of the children and caring for them. Consequently, most women continue to experience their parental roles after divorce, but men with children must reconstruct their parental roles.

There is a cultural difference regarding remarriage after divorce. Jordanian women who lost custody of their children decided to remarry; however, in numerous egalitarian societies, women can retain custody of their children after a remarriage or during cohabitation. The results of this study revealed that a woman's remarriage worsens her relationship with her children. Similarly, divorce complicates the relationship between fathers and their children when they retain custody but remarry a woman who is not supportive of the father-child relationship. Conversely, when a father remarried a woman who supported the father-child relationship, his relationship with the children improved. Prior studies that were conducted in certain egalitarian culture revealed that remarriage of one or both

parents is generally correlated with decreased contact of a nonresidential father (Stephens 1996; Amato and Sobolewski 2004; Sobolewski and King 2005; Kelly 2006). Fathers who have a positive relationship with their children after divorce are more likely to be effective in their children's socialization (Scott et al. 2007). Amato and Gilbreth (1999) found that nonresident fathers' frequent contact with their children led to close relationships. In their meta-analysis, Whiteside and Becker (2000) determined that an association exists between parental cooperation after divorce and more frequent contact between a nonresidential father and his children. Notably, the quality of nonresident father-child relationships is not simply dependent on the frequency of contact (Dunn 2004; Kelly 2006). Furthermore, in the Netherlands and Sweden, prior studies found that father is mentioned less often in a network when the mother has a new partner (Kalmijn and Dronkers 2015).

The results of our study did not indicate any initiative of the divorced couple to establish joint or cooperative custody of the children. This result may have occurred because the study's sample was obtained from visitation centers where conflict between divorced people is very likely. In addition, Jordan and most countries with traditional cultures are unlike those with more egalitarian cultures. A divorce ends the relationship between divorced couples, not only because of the long suffering prior to the divorce but also because of religious restrictions and the conservative culture, which prohibits informal communications between divorced couple. However, mediators or relatives are allowed to arrange the relationships between nonresident fathers and their children, but this aspect is beyond the scope of this study. A meta-analysis of 33 American studies revealed that children involved in joint custody reported superior post-divorce adjustment. Prior studies report that joint custody increases father involvement and allows for more meaningful relationships to develop between nonresident fathers and their children. Children of joint custody cases are generally satisfied and report less feeling of loss when compared to children of sole custody cases (Kelly 2006). Cooperation between parents has a positive effect on the father-child relationship (Sobolewski and King 2005). Holt (2016) conducted a literature review and determined that informal divorce parenting arrangements have positive effects on the children.

Social Stigma

An important finding of this study is that divorced men and women perceive society as stigmatizing divorced women more than divorced men. This result is consistent with prior studies that were conducted in a similar traditional context (Savaya and Cohen 2003; Cohen and Savaya, 1997). In addition, the results of this study revealed

that most men were not embarrassed by the divorce and their positivity and self-appreciation was derived from a short-term interactive environment, particularly in regards to their parents and the prevailing patriarchal culture that does not stigmatize or defame a divorced man. Notably, a clear cultural double standard prevails in the case of sparing a divorced man from stigmatization while he refrains from contact with his daughter because of his divorced status.

The female participants of this study reported that they personally do not feel a negative perception directed toward them by society despite asserting that society does carry a negative perception toward women by blaming and shaming when they are divorced. This result is not a contradiction because their assertions about society are outside the context of their personal experience. By the same token, women are not embarrassed by the divorce label and centered their experience on significant others including the family's attitude and the role it plays in immunizing them against social stigma and its consequences. Notably, the parents' attitude toward the divorce deteriorated in the presence of offspring, which implies that women are implicitly expected to sacrifice for their children; certain men also experienced this effect. This result demonstrates the importance of children in increasing the self-imposed pressure and society's pressure. This result indicates certain progressive changes have occurred in terms of the perceptions of divorced women towards themselves because of family support, the widespread phenomena of divorce, increasing educational levels for women. Because of the modernization processes that have occurred during the last five decades, the Jordanian society is in a transitional process. Certain prior studies that were conducted in a similar traditional context found that divorced women were perceived as bad parents and spouses (Cohen and Savaya 1997; Cohen and Savaya, 2003a). Studies that were conducted in the US found that social support is very important during the divorce and post-divorce; women were most likely be supported by family and friends, men from their network support and new lovers (Krumrei et al. 2007).

The results of this study do not imply that the cultural context in Jordan has become tolerant towards divorced women; conversely, divorced women continue to be stigmatized. However, this stigma depends on how divorce women receive support of their families. In the context of egalitarian cultures, generally, society is more tolerant of divorced women and they are less stigmatized than they were in the past. To summarize, divorced women face greater stigma than divorced men. The results of this study suggest that women who are divorced in traditional cultures require greater courage and

competence to exit their marriage than their male counterparts (Savaya and Cohen 2003).

To conclude, despite changes that have occurred in the structure and functions of a Jordanian family, the post-divorce lived experiences for men and women continue to be influenced by certain cultural factors regarding traditional gender cultures during the divorce experience and its roots. These cultural factors include women retaining custody of their children that is conditioned on them not remarrying, women's continuity in the parental role, lack of cooperation between divorced individuals regarding their children, and continuing social stigma. However, there are indications that progressive change has occurred in regard to women because they have a choice to exit their marriage for the better and their personal experiences during the divorce process did not always result in the women feeling stigmatized outside of the societal context. In addition, the results of this study were similar to the results of similar studies regarding post-divorce experiences that were conducted in an egalitarian culture; however, the post-divorce experience of Jordanian women may be more costly economically and societally.

Limitations and implications

The results of this study should be considered with caution because it is an exploratory and qualitative analysis. The primary limitations of this study are regarding the sample, which was obtained from visitation centers that do not represent participants who are outside of these visitation centers because of the difficulty of finding parents. However, this study contributes to our understanding of certain consequences of divorce on divorced parents, the child-parent relationship and the social stigma of divorced women. Furthermore, we compare the results of this study to studies that were conducted in the Western context.

This study is first of its kind that has been conducted in Jordan and should be regarded as a starting point to conduct more qualitative and quantitative research to reveal more scientific detailed data regarding post-divorce experiences and to increase the validity and reliability of comparisons with other cultural contexts. In addition, this study can be used to guide family policy in Jordan regarding issues that are related to divorce. Numerous issues should be studied, including factors that affect the nonresident father-child relationship, the effect of informal arrangements of divorce and the effects of custody on divorced people and their children, the consequences of childless divorces, factors that affect the adjustment process after the divorce, and post-divorce experiences of divorced people that do not receive services at the visitation centers. Educational programs for individuals who have obtained divorce are needed to help these

individuals maintain peaceful arrangements, to resolve issues related to child support and to restructure the father's parenting role in the best interest of the children and the mothers.

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الملخص :

تحلل هذه الدراسة خبرات ما بعد الطلاق على عينة مؤلفة من ٥٠ مطلق ومطلقة. تتشابه نتائج الدراسة الكيفية والاستطلاعية مع النتائج التي توصلت اليها الدراسات الاخرى في بعض الثقافات الغربية، كما تضمنت نتائج الدراسة قضايا مشابهة لأسباب الطلاق، خبرات المطلقين لفقدان الابناء، والظروف المالية الصعبة للنساء. وعلى الرغم من التغييرات في تركيب ووظيفة الأسرة الاردنية، فان خبرات ما بعد الطلاق استمرت لتتأثر بعوامل كلية للثقافة الجندرية التقليدية المتعلقة بالأسباب التقليدية للطلاق، واحتفاظ النساء بحضانة الأطفال حينما لا يتزوجن، والفشل في تحقيق حضانة تعاونية بين الزوجين بعد الطلاق. بالإضافة الى ذلك، تكشف نتائج الدراسة تغييرات تطويرية في خيارات النساء للطلاق باعتباره تغييراً نحو الأفضل. كما اقت الدراسة الضوء على تصور العنف ضد المرأة المتزوجة كسبب من أسباب الطلاق والدعم الأسري لخفض الآثار السلبية لطلاق النساء بالتزامن مع إدراك وضم المجتمع للنساء المطلقات . ومع ذلك، فان الحاجة ماسة لمزيد من البحث حول موضوع الدراسة لإضافة مزيد من الفهم لهذه الظواهر.

كلمات مفتاحية: الطلاق، خبرات ما بعد الطلاق، الظاهرية، الاردن