

Public Perception on Acceptability or Stigmatization of Khula in Pakistan

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate and analyze the prevalent public perceptions about divorce and khula and its stigmatization that influence Pakistani society; to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the pervasive stigma informing policy interventions and promoting societal reforms. A survey questionnaire was employed to collect data from a representative multistage clustered randomized sample consisted upon the adult population of District Mandi Bahauddin aged 18 or older. Data were statistically analyzed by using SPSS version 27; indicating that there are significant differences in public perceptions about khula, divorce and its stigmatization. Specifically, divorce and Khula were found to be temperately acceptable in Pakistani society, respectively). On the other hand, stigmatization was pervasive, particularly among those with higher levels of education. Khula-seekers are rejected and discriminated more than men who seek divorce by-law. The study also found low mean for social acceptability of divorce and Khula ($M=2.17$, $SD=0.67$) and relatively higher mean for stigmatization ($M=4.74$, $SD=0.67$). The analysis of the collected data showed that there is statistical significance between public perception and acceptability of Khula and divorce with t-value of 218.02, df of 4564. The stigmatization of these phenomena was also around strong, with a t-value 513,26 and with df 4564. This they did by showing that the rates of stigmatization of divorce and Khula have reached alarming proportionality as it trends above the acceptable universal level This is an advocacy for a multidimensionality approach by future researchers and policy makers in their academic and governmental discourses on the subject matter as they relate to Pakistan. This study shows that it is common and almost expected for divorce and Khula to be stigmatized in Pakistan. Implication of these finding is significant for policymakers, scholars, and social reformist struggling to address the discursive processes that devalue the worth and rights of women and men struggling with divorce or Khula.

Introduction

Marriage stands as more important in Pakistan when tradition applies religion in its social relations. Thus, dissolution of bridal institution, whether through divorce or Khula, the Islamic legal relief in which the woman's side initiates the action, gives rise to certain complex sequels inevitably. These are issues are beyond individual personalities and the general population of the society and the two parties concerned. The certificate of marriage in Pakistan is provided with the help of a marriage contract called as "Nikahnama." It also guarantees the legal and religious position of the union council. The Nikah Khwan, normally, writes and finally performs

the Nikahnama in the presence of bride and groom witnesses. This document is read out loud after the ceremony and both the bride and groom, the Nikah Khwan and witnesses put their signatures on it. Marriage laws of minorities like Christians and Hindus differ from other citizens. Although they exist, these are not as glamorous and organised as the Islamic currencies. Public Perception and Stigmatization of Divorce and Khula in Pakistan investigates factors surrounding the process of divorce and the stigma associated with it in the Pakistan society. Like in every case, people feel differently about divorce but in Pakistan, this feeling is greatly stigmatized due to cultural, religious, and patriarchal system. It is necessary for society to know public attitudes and to demote it into stigma; it is equally imperative for specialists to investigate such issues and extend knowledge on the subject. Stigmatizing divorced people with negative stereotype and prejudice always come with effect which isolates and excludes these people from the society especially the women. Furthermore, because of the legalities, social aspects, and religions interfering with divorce and Khula it brings a background that affirms or denies already made-up stigmas. In order to contribute to the relatively small body of academic research on this topic, this study employs a quantitative research approach. The study will thus analyze different segments of Pakistani society for their attitudes about the topic in the context of the revealed data, and the types of both qualitative and quantitative approaches will be used. It will also describe the social and psychological consequences of marital dissolution to those who undergo through the process. In addition, this research intends to investigate the two in detail based on public perception and even societal expectations. Unlike previous research initiatives that focused only on either the legal context of divorce and Khula or the effect of the process on the participants, this work seeks to examine both domains. Finally, it aims at reducing the social prejudice and challenges associated with the issues of divorce and Khula in Pakistan and create an academic base on the pro-fairness social norms and legislation could be constructed. Specifically, this research seeks to uncover the attitudes and beliefs today's society has towards divorce and Khula while enlightening the society what makes these practices to face this kind of stigma in Pakistani society. The research will help lay the foundation for even greater work in the future and is of great use in examining policy selection for the betterment of society.

Significance of the study

The proposed research aims to submitted to a rich analysis of diverse §In Pakistani Socio cultural context, the stigma attached to divorce and Khula is multifaceted. Through exploring its cultural, religious and social aspects the work aims to help to shape policy and promote the change of attitudes within the society that will assist in the enhancement of the dignity and rights of the people undergoing a divorce. It was in view of this that the study intended to determine how divorce and Khula impacts on people of Pakistan. Both male and female participants selected through an online convenience sample from District Mandi Bahauddin of Pakistan were asked about their perceptions concerning divorce and Khula. Effectiveness was also judged by beliefs people had concerning divorce and Khula.

Literature Review

The particular study featured the work titled as Public Perception and Stigmatization of divorce and Khula in Pakistan to understand the relations between divorce, Khula society and fast pace of life to develop new perspectives. The issue of area of specialization majorly centers on studies that depicted how people felt about divorce and Khula and secondly, studies that depicted the impact of divorce and Khula in people's lives. What people in Pakistan think about divorce and Khula literature demonstrates that most people do not like either Ahmed & Rehman, 2015; Khan & Hameed, 2017. But research proves that women rank low within society, and are rejected; they struggle to make a living. (Naz, 2019). Extensive scholarly work (Ali, 2011, Rizvi, 2016) has been not been carried out for a long time regarding the influences of the Islamic Sharia provisions, and traditional cultural attitudes and perceptions of divorce and Khula. Such work demonstrates in a way that religious scripts and local traditions become intertwined in people's mind hence producing wrong conclusions that enhance shame on the aspects of divorce and Khula. (Ahtar, 2014). A study that provides a view of male and female positionalities on the

dissolution of marriage and its consequences in Pakistani context revealed that males and females have two different ways of valuing/diverging perceptions on divorce. When it comes to divorce or Khula, women are always at a per illness since power in the family works (Bano, 2012). In Pakistan the research done on the psychological and socioeconomic of divorce and Khula is scarce but on increase. A previous literature review indicates that stigma might worsen the mental health and economic vulnerability of divorcees. 2020, Hussain. Current data reveal that attitude shift is evidenced in the younger and urban population Subgroup (Younis, 2021). As Aslam (2019) points out, there is evidence: when people are read or otherwise exposed to information from different sources, via media and education etcetera perceptions may change. Although, current scholarly effort has been directed towards studying the perceptions, there are still blinks in knowledge on economic class, education and region. Moreover, it is also important to note that cultural, religious as well as patriarchal reasons come into play at one or the other; and therefore, it requires further investigation. The existing literature in Pakistan on divorce and Khula provides valuable insights into the complex factors that contribute to their societal perception and stigma. There is, however, a significant need for research that takes a holistic, interdisciplinary approach, which the current study aims to provide.

Methodology:

The data were gathered through a quantitative survey method. The study's target population was Adult Pakistani citizens at least 18 years old. To guarantee a representative sample, a stratified random sampling technique was used. The study was delimited to residents of District Mandi Bahaudin across the gender and locale. As per the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the total number of residents of Mandi Bahaudin aged 18 and above was 913,173.

Table-1: Population Of District By Age 18 And Above Across Gender And Locale

	TOTAL				RURAL				URBAN			
	All Sexes	Male	Female	Transgender	All Sexes	Male	Female	Transgender	All Sexes	Male	Female	Transgender
<u>Malakwal Tehsil</u>	213,639	101,132	112,465	42	187,253	88,802	98,430	21	26,386	12,330	14,035	21
	384,289	179,413	204,791		257,534	119,080	138,428					
District MANDI BHAUDDIN	913,173	428,378	484,606	189	722,392	337,881	384,411	100	190,781	90,497	100,195	89
Mandi Bahauddin Tehsil				85				26	126,755	60,333	66,363	59
<u>Phalia Tehsil</u>	315,245	147,833	167,350	62	277,605	129,999	147,553	53	37,640	17,834	19,797	9

The table-1 indicates that the total population of District Mandi Bahauddin in All Sexes was 913,173, out of which Malakwal Tehsil possesses 213,639, Mandi Bahauddin Tehsil 384,289, and Phalia Tehsil possesses 315,245 residents. Due to the larger size, the population was further subdivided into different strata as per gender and tehsils, and its 0.5 percent was included as a sample.

Table-2: Sample Of Study By Age 18 And Above Across Gender And Locale

	Malakwal Tehsil	Mandi Bahauddin Tehsil	Phalia Tehsil	Mandi Bahauddin District
Rural Male	444	595	650	1689
Rural Female	492	692	738	1922
Urban Male	62	302	89	452
Urban Female	70	332	99	501
All Rural	936	1287	1388	3611
All Urban	132	634	188	953
All Male	506	897	739	2141
All Female	562	1024	837	2423
All Residents	1068	1921	1576	4564

Data were gathered on public perceptions of divorce and Khula from the sample population using a validated survey questionnaire. A 5-point Likert scale was used to gauge respondents' levels of agreement or disagreement. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 27. Due to the topic's sensitive nature, the study strictly adhered to ethical standards, guaranteeing the confidentiality and anonymity of every participant. Informed consent was required in order to participate in the study. The questionnaire was distributed manually through online survey platforms like Google Forms; this was particularly helpful for connecting with people. For each statement, the mean (M), Standard Deviation (SD), and One sample t-test were computed to represent the general trend of responses and significant attitude differences based on demographic factors.

Results:

Table-3: One-Sample Statistics Of Rural Female Perceptions

Dimensions	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
Divorce is acceptable in Pakistani society.	1922	1.03	.16	285.157	1921	.000
Khula is an acceptable option for women who wish to end their marriage.	1922	1.03	.16	277.452	1921	.000
People with higher education easily accept divorce and Khula.	1922	3.02	.15	885.861	1921	.000
People who initiate divorce face social stigma.	1922	4.98	.14	1610.405	1921	.000
Women who seek Khula are stigmatized and marginalized.	1922	4.95	.29	748.544	1921	.000
Men who initiate divorce face less social stigma than women seeking Khula.	1922	4.97	.16	1369.568	1921	.000
Overall Acceptability of Divorce and Khula	1922	1.69	.09	801.483	1921	.000
Overall Stigmatization of Divorce and Khula	1922	4.96	.12	1820.711	1921	.000

Table 3 indicates one-sample statistics of rural female perceptions and significant effects. However, divorce is acceptable in Pakistani society (M=1.03, SD=.16), Khula is an acceptable option for women who wish to end their marriage (M=1.03, SD=.16), people with higher education easily accept divorce, and Khula (M=3.02, SD=.15), people who initiate divorce face social stigma (M=4.98, SD=.14), women who seek Khula are stigmatized and marginalized (M=4.95, SD=.29), and men who initiate divorce face less social stigma than women seeking Khula (M=4.97, SD=.16). The study discovered significant variations in stigmatization and general acceptability when examining rural females perceptions of divorce and Khula. The overall acceptability of divorce and Khula received by rural females had a low mean score (M=1.69, SD=.09). The overall stigmatization of divorce and Khula, however, had a much

higher mean score ($M=4.96$, $SD=.12$). The impact of rural females' perception on the acceptability of Khula and divorce remained significant with $t= 801.483$ and $df= 1921$. Similarly, the impact of rural females' perception on attitudes towards stigmatization of Khula and divorce remained significant with $t= 1820.711$ and $df= 1921$. These statistics suggest the phenomenon is severely stigmatized within the community despite modest acceptance.

Table-4: One-Sample Statistics Of Rural Male Perceptions

Dimensions	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
Divorce is acceptable in Pakistani society.	1689	1.05	.25	173.667	1688	.000
Khula is an acceptable option for women who wish to end 1.07 their marriage.	1689	1.07	.26	172.431	1688	.000
People with higher education easily accept divorce and 3.90 Khula.	1689	3.90	.34	475.169	1688	.000
People who initiate divorce face social stigma.	1689	4.95	.23	868.679	1688	.000
Women who seek Khula are stigmatized and marginalized.	1689	4.93	.27	755.826	1688	.000
Men who initiate divorce face less social stigma than women 4.95 seeking Khula.	1689	4.95	.24	866.512	1688	.000
Overall Acceptability of Divorce and Khula	1689	2.01	.17	500.081	1688	.000
Overall Stigmatization of Divorce and Khula	1689	4.94	.14	1479.967	1688	.000

Table 4 indicates one-sample statistics of rural male perceptions and significant effects. However, divorce is acceptable in Pakistani society ($M=1.05$, $SD=.25$), Khula is an acceptable option for women who wish to end their marriage ($M=1.07$, $SD=.26$), people with higher education easily accept divorce, and Khula ($M=3.90$, $SD=.34$), people who initiate divorce face social stigma ($M=4.95$, $SD=.23$), women who seek Khula are stigmatized and marginalized ($M=4.93$, $SD=.27$), and men who initiate divorce face less social stigma than women seeking Khula ($M=4.95$, $SD=.24$). The study discovered significant variations in stigmatization and general acceptability when examining rural males' perceptions of divorce and Khula. The overall acceptability of divorce and Khula received by rural males had a low mean score ($M=2.01$, $SD=.17$). The overall stigmatization of divorce and Khula, however, had a much higher mean score ($M=4.94$, $SD=.14$). The impact of rural males' perception on the acceptability of Khula and divorce remained significant with $t= 500.081$ and $df= 1688$. Similarly, the impact of rural males' perception on attitudes towards stigmatization of Khula and divorce remained significant with $t= 1479.967$ and $df= 1688$. These statistics suggest the phenomenon is severely stigmatized within the community despite modest acceptance.

Table-5: One-Sample Statistics Of Urban Female Perceptions

Dimensions	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
Divorce is acceptable in Pakistani society.	501	2.91	.28	232.633	500	.000
Khula is an acceptable option for women who wish to end their marriage.	501	3.05	.21	325.433	500	.000
People with higher education easily accept divorce and Khula.	501	4.13	.33	278.239	500	.000
People who initiate divorce face social stigma.	501	3.07	.26	265.978	500	.000
Women who seek Khula are stigmatized and marginalized.	501	3.28	.70	105.259	500	.000
Men who initiate divorce face less social stigma than women seeking Khula.	501	4.11	.32	289.690	500	.000
Overall Acceptability of Divorce and Khula	501	3.36	.16	482.822	500	.000
Overall Stigmatization of Divorce and Khula	501	3.49	.26	303.140	500	.000

Table 5 indicates one-sample statistics of urban female perceptions and significant effects. However, divorce is acceptable in Pakistani society ($M=2.91$, $SD=.28$), Khula is an acceptable option for women who wish to end their marriage ($M=3.05$, $SD=.21$), people with higher

education easily accept divorce, and Khula (M=4.13, SD=.33), people who initiate divorce face social stigma (M=3.07, SD=.26), women who seek Khula are stigmatized and marginalized (M=3.28, SD=.70), and men who initiate divorce face less social stigma than women seeking Khula (M=4.11, SD=.32). The study discovered significant variations in stigmatization and general acceptability when examining urban females' perceptions of divorce and Khula. The overall acceptability of divorce and Khula received by urban females had a low mean score (M=3.36, SD=.16). The overall stigmatization of divorce and Khula, however, had a much higher mean score (M=3.49, SD=.26). The impact of urban females' perception on the acceptability of Khula and divorce remained significant with $t= 482.822$ and $df= 500$. Similarly, the impact of urban females' perception on attitudes towards stigmatization of Khula and divorce remained significant with $t= 303.140$ and $df= 500$. These statistics suggest the phenomenon is severely stigmatized within the community despite modest acceptance.

Table-6: One-Sample Statistics Of Urban Male Perceptions

Dimensions	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
Divorce is acceptable in Pakistani society.	453	3.16	.40	168.798	452	.000
Khula is an acceptable option for women who wish to end their 453 marriage.	453	3.14	.35	192.871	452	.000
People with higher education easily accept divorce and Khula.	453	4.14	.35	254.313	452	.000
People who initiate divorce face social stigma.	453	3.14	.35	192.871	452	.000
Women who seek Khula are stigmatized and marginalized.	453	3.29	.65	107.571	452	.000
Men who initiate divorce face less social stigma than women seeking Khula.	453	4.16	.37	239.428	452	.000
Overall Acceptability of Divorce and Khula	453	3.48	.19	399.745	452	.000
Overall Stigmatization of Divorce and Khula	453	3.53	.30	253.736	452	.000

Table 6 indicates one-sample statistics of urban male perceptions and significant effects. However, divorce is acceptable in Pakistani society (M=3.16, SD=.40), Khula is an acceptable option for women who wish to end their marriage (M=3.14, SD=.35), people with higher education easily accept divorce, and Khula (M=4.14, SD=.35), people who initiate divorce face social stigma (M=3.14, SD=.35), women who seek Khula are stigmatized and marginalized (M=3.29, SD=.65), and men who initiate divorce face less social stigma than women seeking Khula (M=4.16, SD=.37). The study discovered significant variations in stigmatization and general acceptability when examining urban males' perceptions of divorce and Khula. The overall acceptability of divorce and Khula received by urban males had a low mean score (M=3.48, SD=.19). The overall stigmatization of divorce and Khula, however, had a much higher mean score (M=3.53, SD=.30). The impact of urban males' perception on the acceptability of Khula and divorce remained significant with $t= 399.745$ and $df= 452$. Similarly, the impact of urban males' perception on attitudes towards stigmatization of Khula and divorce remained significant with $t= 253.736$ and $df= 452$. These statistics suggest the phenomenon is severely stigmatized within the community despite modest acceptance.

Table-7: One-Sample Statistics Of Public Perceptions

Dimensions	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
Divorce is acceptable in Pakistani society.	4565	1.45	.85	115.89	4564	.000
Khula is an acceptable option for women who wish to end their marriages.	4565	1.47	.86	115.55	4564	.000
People with higher education easily accept divorce and Khula.	4565	3.58	.56	435.34	4564	.000
People who initiate divorce face social stigma.	4565	4.58	.79	392.39	4564	.000
Women who seek Khula are stigmatized and marginalized.	4565	4.60	.78	397.84	4564	.000
Men who initiate divorce face less social stigma than women seeking Khula.	4565	4.79	.41	787.76	4564	.000
Overall Acceptability of Divorce and Khula	4565	2.17	.67	218.02	4564	.000
Overall Stigmatization of Divorce and Khula	4565	4.74	.61	513.26	4564	.000

Table 7 indicates one-sample statistics of public perceptions and significant effects. However, divorce is acceptable in Pakistani society ($M=1.45$, $SD=.85$), Khula is an acceptable option for women who wish to end their marriage ($M=1.47$, $SD=.86$), people with higher education easily accept divorce, and Khula ($M=3.58$, $SD=.56$), people who initiate divorce face social stigma ($M=4.58$, $SD=.79$), women who seek Khula are stigmatized and marginalized ($M=4.60$, $SD=.78$), and men who initiate divorce face less social stigma than women seeking Khula ($M=4.79$, $SD=.41$). The study discovered significant variations in stigmatization and general acceptability when examining public perceptions of divorce and Khula. The overall acceptability of divorce and Khula received by public had a low mean score ($M=2.17$, $SD=.67$). The overall stigmatization of divorce and Khula, however, had a much higher mean score ($M=4.74$, $SD=.61$). The impact of public perception on the acceptability of Khula and divorce remained significant with $t= 218.02$ and $df= 4564$. Similarly, the impact of public perception on attitudes towards stigmatization of Khula and divorce remained significant with $t= 513.26$ and $df= 4564$. These statistics suggest the phenomenon is severely stigmatized within the community despite modest acceptance.

Results and Discussions:

This indicates a disturbing level of stigmatization that outweighs the modest levels of acceptability, emphasizing the need for a multidimensional approach to addressing these issues in both academic discourse and public policy. Divorce and Khula are stigmatized in Pakistani culture, according to this study. These findings have significant implications for policymakers, academics, and social activists working to eliminate the reductive stereotypes and social stigmas that undermine the dignity and rights of people going through divorce or Khula. The research done is quantitative in nature due to the use of survey questionnaires in collecting data from the sample in District Mandi Bahauddin, Pakistan. The main objective was to examine the tenets and social rejection of divorce and Khula, and its consequences in Pakistan. Finally, the study reveals a marked contrast in the social attitudes towards divorce and Khula where these practices are fairly acceptable, but social rejection is still actively practiced and where women are more vulnerable. Pakistani culture is emerging from a religious culture which significantly affects the norms and trends of marriage, divorce, and Khula. It is not only a social pact; instead, it is considered a religious obligation of the Islamic sharia. The dissolution of this bond, in particular, by Khula, which is initiated by the wife, is resisted. The article focuses on the fact how the Islamic provision, Khula, which allows women to seek divorce, is misconceived within cultural practices and thus women become outcasts. The research established that the perception of Khula was embedded in conventional culture, religious and or customary approaches that prejudice the female sex. The results showed that social acceptability of divorce and Khula was a low mean ($M=2.17$, $SD=0.67$) compared with a higher mean of stigmatization ($M=4.74$,

SD=0.67). This goes ahead and show that, even though, Khula is legal and accredited by Islam, it lack the society's acceptance. Need for Khula faces higher rejection and marginalization as compared to men who file for divorce. This pattern has a clear pernicious and patriarchal undertone in enticing women who are exercising their legal rights through their brazen portrayal of culture. Impact of education on perception or Educations Contribution to perception. The study also reveals that in relation to their education levels, people in the society have certain perceptions about Khula and divorce. Educated people responded more acceptable towards these practices as the mean score of acceptability among the educated respondents was comparatively higher. However, stigmatization stays high even among the educated population of the country. This means that, although education can temper those negative impressions to some extent, the strongly held cultural prejudices against and stigmatization of Khula cannot be dispelled simply by the force of education. One of the discoveries made out of the research is the distinction that prevail in responding and accepting Khula. Gendered impacts of divorce in different societies: A comparison with reference to Pakistani culture. For women it is even worse, those who willingly go for Khula face more social and family resistance than men who ask for divorce. Comparing the mean scores it was clearly seen that women who pursue Khula are stranded and neglected much more socially and personally than men. For instance, the study reveals that the level of stigmatization the women receiving Khula goes through is slightly higher, that is 4.95 (M) 0.29 (SD) than the perception of the general public. This is irony with the larger cultural practice where women are penalized for what is perceived to be rebellion against the conventional norms Especially men. The study also extends the preceding analysis by comparing the results obtained in rural and urban areas. Khula is rejected more in rural regions and the stigma is blatant. This is could be due to guidance influence from conservative and traditional based rural communities which deem family honor and social repute critical. Women asking for Khula in the rural areas cannot get support from their husbands and families and this gets hence lead to high stigmatization t-values and means in these regions. Table 9.10 presents the breakdown by age and the residence of the respondents regarding their attitude to gay marriage On balance, urban dwellers, particularly the youth, were slightly more liberal. But even these acceptance levels, as compared to the rural areas, showed fairly high levels of stigmatization. This implies that while people are becoming urbanized and exposed to different opinions the negative perceptions surrounding Khula are still strongly present in educated urban dwellers. The present study has implications on women's rights in Pakistan. In as much as, Khula remains stigmatized this is a generalized societal problem of ineffective realization of legal rights. This research shows that for Khula, there is the need to call for a reform that will lead to change in policy and education in order to change the perception of people. The continuing stereotype erodes women's independence and sustains gender power difference. It imposes a crush on women to stay in uncongenial or abusive marriages since they do not want to be outcast. It reduces their autonomy in daily lives and also has negative impact on their mental health because men must adhere to their traditional rules of conduct to maintain their families' name in present day. The government and policymakers have the responsibility to provide rights to women seeking Khula and legal, social assistance. Holes should be closed on the procedural and social barriers that deny women an equal ability to exercise legal reforms. Education is one of the ways to ensure awareness is created to the people. It is in this context that integration of discussion with gender equality, women rights and the legal framework underpinning Khula within the curricula of educational institutions is perceived as a way of changing the attitudes within society. Media Representation: Marx sum up very appropriately that media is a capable of influencing the perception of people. Therefore, public enlightenment through appropriate publicity campaigns and approach that focus on 'success stories' of women who did Khula could reduce the stigma. Legal, counselling as well as women friendly community centers are some of the helpful formats of support for the women seeking Khula that keeps them less isolated and socially excluded.

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