



A Phenomenological Analysis of Divorced Women's Experiences with Multiple Sexual Relationships After Divorce

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of this study was to explore and analyze the lived experiences of divorced women who engage in multiple sexual relationships after divorce, focusing on psychological, social, familial, economic, and identity-related dimensions.

Methods and Materials: This research employed a qualitative phenomenological design to capture the subjective meanings of participants' post-divorce experiences. Ten divorced women attending a family counseling clinic in Shiraz were recruited through purposive sampling, based on criteria including at least one year since divorce, a history of multiple sexual relationships, and willingness to share personal experiences. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, complemented by field notes and document analysis. Data analysis followed Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory methodology, involving open, axial, and selective coding. Trustworthiness was ensured through prolonged engagement, member checking, peer debriefing, and maintaining an audit trail. Ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and participant autonomy were strictly observed.

Findings: The analysis revealed six overarching dimensions shaping the experiences of divorced women: (1) psychological and emotional struggles characterized by loneliness, ambivalence, and fear of judgment; (2) social and cultural pressures involving stigma, secrecy, and value conflicts; (3) identity and gender redefinition, including proving femininity, asserting independence, and exercising control over sexuality; (4) familial dynamics, such as estrangement, concealment from relatives, and concern about children; (5) economic realities, with experiences of both dependency and empowerment through financial independence; and (6) coping strategies and personal reconstruction, including spiritual practices, counseling, journaling, and efforts to build healthier relationships.

Conclusion: The study underscores that divorced women's engagement in multiple sexual relationships is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by intersecting

psychological, social, familial, cultural, and economic forces. These experiences reveal both vulnerability and resilience, emphasizing the need for supportive interventions, culturally sensitive counseling, and policies that reduce stigma while fostering autonomy and well-being.

Keywords: *Divorce; multiple sexual relationships; phenomenology; women's lived experiences; identity reconstruction; coping strategies*

1. Introduction

Divorce, as a profound social and personal transformation, has attracted increasing scholarly attention across cultural, psychological, economic, and legal domains. The dissolution of marriage not only alters intimate relationships between spouses but also restructures family systems, social networks, and individual trajectories of identity and well-being. In contemporary societies, the complexity of divorce is heightened by changing marriage patterns, rising rates of separation, and diverse post-divorce experiences that differ across contexts. Scholars emphasize that divorce is not a singular event but a multidimensional process encompassing emotional, social, economic, and cultural adjustments (McLean et al., 2024; Mohamadian et al., 2024). These transformations have become particularly visible among women, whose post-divorce realities reflect both empowerment and vulnerability, shaped by societal norms, personal choices, and structural inequalities (Al-shahrani & Hammad, 2023a, 2023b).

Global demographic data indicate that marriage and divorce trajectories vary widely across societies. For instance, longitudinal evidence from the United States suggests that marital transitions, including early marriage, separation, and re-partnering, follow patterned courses across the life span, influenced by education, socioeconomic status, and cultural shifts (Aughinbaugh & Rothstein, 2024; Blasutto, 2023). In European contexts, research has highlighted how cohabitation, delayed marriage, and new relational strategies have redefined the stability of unions and subsequent separation risks (Ciritel, 2022; Kailaheimo-Lönnqvist et al., 2021). Historical analysis further demonstrates that divorce is not a purely modern phenomenon but one with deep institutional and cultural roots, as shown by studies on marital dissolution in early modern England (Kesselring & Stretton, 2022). However, what distinguishes contemporary divorce is its increasing normalization alongside persistent cultural and gendered stigmas, which intersect to shape lived experiences in distinctive ways (Hogendoorn & Berg, 2024; Schmauk & Kridahl, 2024).

In non-Western contexts, divorce often carries additional cultural and moral complexities. For example, in China, patterns of marital dissolution and childlessness reveal tensions between individual choices and collective family expectations (Wang & Mu, 2025). The consequences of parental divorce on children's marital well-being and sexual development further underscore how family breakdown has long-term intergenerational effects (Zhang, 2022). Similarly, studies in rural Malawi show that divorce significantly shapes women's pathways into adulthood, influencing their economic and social participation in community life (McLean et al., 2024). Research from Indonesia links early marriage with higher divorce risks, demonstrating the intersection of structural inequalities and cultural practices (Jannah, 2023). In Middle Eastern contexts, Islamic jurisprudence around marriage and divorce continues to shape both the legality and morality of marital dissolution, including issues such as remarriage during the 'iddah period (Bariah & Ferianto, 2024).

Women's post-divorce experiences are especially marked by emotional and psychological transformations. Studies from Saudi Arabia reveal that emotional divorce—the breakdown of marital intimacy without formal separation—can have profound effects on women's mental health, including heightened risks of depression, alexithymia, and difficulties with emotional regulation (Al-shahrani & Hammad, 2023a, 2023b). Other research highlights the role of attachment styles and sexual functioning in predicting emotional divorce, pointing to the complexity of women's relational vulnerabilities (Khorami et al., 2021). These findings resonate with broader scholarship emphasizing the interplay between communication, conflict resolution, and sexual satisfaction as key predictors of marital stability or breakdown (Gen et al., 2021). Divorce thus represents not only the dissolution of a legal contract but also the rupture of emotional bonds, which in turn shapes women's engagement in subsequent intimate relationships.

A growing body of research examines the sexual lives of divorced women, particularly their navigation of multiple sexual partnerships. Evidence from sub-Saharan Africa suggests that multiple sexual relationships among women are associated with socioeconomic vulnerability, cultural

expectations, and limited access to sexual health resources (Mbele, 2024). Similar studies in Ghana and England have shown that concurrent partnerships are influenced by gender norms, reproductive expectations, and strategies for social survival (Cassels et al., 2019; Wayal et al., 2020). In contexts such as methadone maintenance treatment populations, sexual inactivity has also been documented, revealing the heterogeneity of post-marital sexual trajectories (Ramli et al., 2020). Together, these findings suggest that women's sexual behaviors after marital breakdown cannot be understood in isolation but must be contextualized within broader cultural, health, and economic frameworks.

The social stigma surrounding divorced women often intensifies the complexity of their intimate lives. In many societies, divorced women are judged more harshly than divorced men, a reflection of entrenched gender double standards. Historical and contemporary evidence from Russia, Turkey, and other transitional contexts shows that divorce intersects with fertility trends, employment patterns, and women's economic participation (Sinelnikov, 2019; Telatar, 2019). The fear of social judgment leads many women to conceal their relationships, adopt protective strategies, and negotiate cultural expectations while pursuing intimacy (Desmaisi et al., 2019; Stokes et al., 2019). These coping strategies often involve balancing personal desires for affection, validation, or autonomy with the potential consequences of stigmatization, rejection, or loss of family support.

The economic implications of divorce are also significant. Comparative studies from Germany and Sweden reveal that divorce has long-term gendered consequences for pension income and financial security, disproportionately affecting women (Schmauk & Kridahl, 2024). Women may rely on sexual or emotional partnerships as strategies for survival or for achieving greater autonomy, reflecting both vulnerabilities and opportunities (Payne, 2021; Tsang, 2021). These dynamics are compounded by legal and institutional contexts, where the dissolution of marriage not only redistributes property and custody rights but also reconfigures gender roles and expectations (Parsakia & Darbani, 2022). In some cases, women describe post-divorce life as a chance for personal growth and the assertion of independence, while others experience economic dependency and reduced life chances (Hombrados & Özcan, 2023; Torki & Etemadi, 2024).

At the intersection of psychology, culture, and economy, divorced women's experiences of multiple sexual relationships after divorce reveal layered realities. On one

hand, such relationships may provide a sense of empowerment, healing, or redefinition of identity. On the other hand, they expose women to risks of exploitation, emotional instability, and intensified social judgment. Previous research underscores that these dynamics cannot be disentangled from structural inequalities, cultural norms, and legal frameworks (Blasutto, 2023; Hogendoorn & Berg, 2024). The phenomenological approach is therefore well-suited to exploring these lived experiences, as it foregrounds subjective meaning-making and situates personal narratives within broader social contexts (Mbele, 2024; Wayal et al., 2020).

In addition, coping strategies adopted by divorced women reflect both resilience and vulnerability. For some, spiritual practices, counseling, and writing are ways of managing emotional turmoil and reconstructing selfhood (Mohamadian et al., 2024). For others, the pursuit of new, healthier relationships serves as a pathway toward stability and emotional fulfillment (McLean et al., 2024). The heterogeneity of these strategies reflects the diverse cultural, religious, and economic landscapes in which women live. Scholars argue that understanding such strategies is essential not only for academic insight but also for informing social policies, counseling practices, and community support systems (Bariah & Ferianto, 2024; Wang & Mu, 2025).

Taken together, the existing literature suggests that post-divorce sexual relationships among women are not merely personal choices but are embedded in social, cultural, and economic structures. They represent attempts to navigate loneliness, reconstruct identity, and negotiate societal pressures while coping with financial realities and psychological needs. Yet, despite extensive research on divorce, there remains a gap in understanding the lived experiences of divorced women who engage in multiple sexual relationships, particularly in contexts where cultural stigma and gender inequalities remain powerful. By adopting a phenomenological perspective, this study seeks to provide a nuanced and in-depth exploration of these women's experiences, shedding light on the interplay between inner emotions, social judgments, identity reconstruction, family dynamics, and economic independence. The goal is to illuminate how divorced women themselves interpret and make sense of their choices, and how these meanings can inform broader efforts to support their well-being and integration into society.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study design and Participant

The present study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach, as this design allows for a deep exploration of the lived experiences of divorced women who have engaged in multiple sexual relationships after divorce. Phenomenology is particularly suited for investigating subjective experiences, emotional meanings, and personal interpretations that are often hidden beneath social norms and cultural expectations. The aim was to uncover the personal narratives, emotions, and decision-making processes of women who navigate intimate relationships in the context of post-divorce life, while minimizing the researcher's prior assumptions. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on specific inclusion criteria, namely being divorced for at least one year, having engaged in more than one sexual relationship during that period, and demonstrating readiness to share personal experiences openly. The sample consisted of ten women who attended a family counseling clinic in Shiraz. Participants represented different age groups, educational levels, and socioeconomic backgrounds, reflecting the diversity of urban and semi-urban contexts. Recruitment continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning that no new themes or insights emerged from subsequent interviews. Women unwilling to continue participation, those unable to articulate their experiences due to severe psychological difficulties, or those whose accounts did not align with the inclusion criteria were excluded.

2.2. Measures

To collect data, multiple techniques were applied in order to achieve a comprehensive and reliable understanding of the phenomenon. The primary data collection tool was the semi-structured in-depth interview, widely recognized in phenomenological studies for its ability to elicit rich, detailed narratives. Interviews were guided by open-ended questions designed around the objectives of the study and informed by theoretical and empirical literature. The questions were reviewed by three faculty members in psychology to establish face and content validity. Pilot interviews were conducted to refine the interview protocol, and modifications were made to ensure clarity and relevance. Each interview began with a trust-building process to create a safe environment for disclosure. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent, and field notes were taken to capture nonverbal cues and contextual observations. Complementary data sources

included direct observations and document analysis, which provided further insight into the cultural and social context shaping the women's experiences.

2.3. Data Analysis

The process of data analysis followed the grounded theory methodology of Strauss and Corbin, which was applied in line with the phenomenological orientation of the study. Analysis occurred concurrently with data collection, ensuring an iterative process where insights from earlier interviews informed subsequent ones. In the open coding phase, interview transcripts were read line by line, and meaningful segments were labeled with initial codes. These codes often reflected the participants' own words, ensuring closeness to the lived experience. Through constant comparison, similar codes were grouped into broader categories. The axial coding stage involved identifying relationships between categories, guided by Strauss and Corbin's paradigm model, which examines causal conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences. This process helped situate the women's experiences within broader social, cultural, and psychological contexts. Finally, selective coding was undertaken to integrate the categories into a coherent central theme, or core category, that encapsulated the essence of the phenomenon. Throughout this analytic process, analytical memos were written to document emerging insights, relationships among concepts, and the researcher's reflections.

Trustworthiness of the findings was ensured through several strategies. Prolonged engagement with participants, repeated interviews, and in-depth immersion in the data helped strengthen credibility. Member checking was conducted by returning preliminary findings and coded summaries to participants for feedback, ensuring alignment with their lived experiences. Peer debriefing with experienced qualitative researchers provided critical external review of the coding process and emerging categories, helping to reduce bias. Negative case analysis was performed by examining data that contradicted emerging themes, thereby refining the theoretical model and enhancing validity. Detailed descriptions of the research context, participant demographics, and analytic procedures were provided to increase transferability, enabling readers to assess applicability to other contexts. An audit trail documenting every stage of the research—from participant selection and interview protocol design to coding decisions

and memo writing—was maintained to enhance dependability and confirmability.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants were fully informed of the study's objectives, their right to withdraw at any point, and the measures taken to protect confidentiality and anonymity. Written informed consent was obtained before data collection, and pseudonyms were used in transcripts and reporting to ensure privacy. All audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored and accessible only to the research team. Emotional sensitivity was prioritized during interviews, with the researcher providing supportive responses and referral information if participants experienced distress. Approval for conducting the study was obtained from the relevant university ethics committee.

3. Findings and Results

Analysis of the interviews with divorced women revealed a complex and multifaceted set of experiences surrounding their involvement in multiple sexual relationships after divorce. The narratives illustrated that these experiences were deeply embedded within cultural norms, personal histories, and the broader social environment in which the women lived. While participants shared diverse perspectives shaped by their age, education, and socioeconomic background, a number of common patterns and thematic categories emerged, reflecting the ways in which women negotiated identity, intimacy, and stigma in their post-divorce lives.

One of the primary findings centered on the theme of reconstruction of identity and selfhood. Many participants

described divorce as a turning point that shattered their previous roles and expectations, compelling them to reimagine themselves outside the framework of marriage. Sexual relationships, in this sense, became a space through which women explored autonomy, self-expression, and even a sense of reclaiming control over their bodies. Yet, this process was also fraught with ambivalence; alongside feelings of empowerment, participants expressed guilt, confusion, and fear of social judgment.

Another major theme that emerged was the negotiation of societal stigma and cultural constraints. The women's accounts revealed that, although engaging in multiple relationships provided moments of intimacy and companionship, it also exposed them to pervasive social scrutiny. Participants described strategies to conceal their relationships from family, community, and even close friends, fearing reputational damage and exclusion. These narratives highlighted the tension between personal desires and societal expectations, with participants often caught between the need for emotional and sexual fulfillment and the pressure to conform to cultural norms.

A further finding related to the emotional and psychological consequences of multiple relationships. For some participants, these relationships offered comfort, healing, and a temporary sense of belonging after the rupture of divorce. Others, however, reported cycles of disappointment, emotional detachment, or exploitation within these encounters. Themes of loneliness, unmet expectations, and a search for stability recurred throughout the data, suggesting that the women's post-divorce relationships were simultaneously sources of relief and additional vulnerability.

Table 1

Phenomenological Analysis of Divorced Women's Lived Experiences with Multiple Sexual Relationships Based on Strauss and Corbin's Model

Dimension	Conceptual Category	Codes
Psychological and Emotional	Inner emotional experiences – loneliness – social anxiety – emotional ambivalence – emotional confusion – fear of judgment	Severe feelings of loneliness and emotional emptiness – anxiety about social acceptance – guilt and emotional ambivalence – confusion in understanding emotions after relationships – fear of judgment by society and family
Social-Value	Social attitudes and pressures – value conflicts – social stigma – maintaining respectable appearance – differential judgment – concealment of relationships	Conflict between traditional values and modern behavior – social stigma and anxiety about disclosure – efforts to maintain a respectable social appearance – different standards of judgment toward divorced women – pressure to keep relationships hidden
Identity-Gender	New gender role – proving femininity – conflict between desire and expectation – independent identity – control over body	Redefinition of gender role after divorce – search for proving femininity and attractiveness – conflict between personal desire and social expectations – emergence of identity independent from ex-husband – effort to control body and sexual choices

Familial and Post-Divorce Interactions	Family estrangement – concern about children – concealment from relatives – fear of rejection	Estrangement in relationships with family of origin or ex-husband – concern about effects of relationships on children – hiding relationships from close relatives – fear of losing family support
Economic and Personal Independence	Financial dependency – improving welfare – economic independence – power in relationships	Financial dependency on sexual partners in some cases – use of relationships to improve relative welfare – pursuit of economic independence and free decision-making – experience of power in non-dependent relationships
Coping Strategies and Personal Reconstruction	Spiritual refuge – self-expression – limited counseling – gradual acceptance – search for healthy relationships	Resorting to prayer, meditation, or religion – writing diaries and sharing experiences for emotional release – limited use of counselor or trusted friend – gradual acceptance of relationships as part of new life – effort to seek healthier emotional relationships

Psychological and Emotional Dimension

The psychological and emotional dimension revealed that the women's experiences were marked by a profound sense of loneliness and emptiness following divorce, which often drove them toward seeking intimacy through multiple sexual relationships. Many participants described this process as a paradoxical journey, wherein the fulfillment of momentary companionship was overshadowed by persistent anxiety regarding social acceptance. Guilt and emotional ambivalence were strong undercurrents, as women felt torn between personal desires and societal expectations, often oscillating between moments of liberation and overwhelming shame. Emotional confusion was also recurrent, with participants struggling to interpret their feelings in the aftermath of new relationships. This internal conflict was intensified by the constant fear of judgment by both family and society, highlighting how external perceptions exacerbated their inner turmoil and shaped their emotional trajectories.

Social-Value Dimension

The social-value dimension underscored the weight of cultural norms and collective expectations in shaping women's lived realities after divorce. Participants emphasized a continuous conflict between inherited traditional values and their lived behavior in engaging with new relationships, which often left them in a state of moral tension. Social stigma was a central theme, with participants reporting anxiety about being exposed or labeled negatively. To navigate these pressures, many women made conscious efforts to maintain a respectable public image, projecting conformity while concealing aspects of their private lives. They also noted that divorced women were judged more harshly than men or never-married women, reflecting a double standard in social perception. This pervasive stigma led to a culture of secrecy, forcing women to hide their relationships even from supportive peers, thereby reinforcing feelings of isolation and limiting opportunities for open dialogue.

Identity-Gender Dimension

The identity-gender dimension captured the ways in which women redefined their gender roles and personal identities in the wake of divorce. Many participants described engaging in multiple sexual relationships as part of a broader process of proving their femininity and attractiveness, reclaiming aspects of themselves that had been overshadowed during marriage. However, this search for validation often clashed with societal expectations of modesty and restraint, creating a persistent conflict between personal desire and external demands. The women also emphasized the emergence of an independent identity distinct from their ex-husbands, as they began to see themselves not merely as former wives or mothers but as individuals with agency and autonomy. Central to this transformation was the perception of control over their own bodies and sexual choices, which was described as both empowering and socially contested, illustrating the tension between individual agency and collective moral frameworks.

Familial and Post-Divorce Interactions Dimension

The familial and post-divorce interactions dimension revealed strained and often fragile relationships within the family system. Participants recounted emotional coldness or outright estrangement from their families of origin or former in-laws, which deepened their sense of isolation. Concern for children was a recurring theme, with women expressing fear that their post-divorce relationships might negatively affect their children's upbringing, social standing, or emotional stability. To manage these concerns, many opted to conceal their relationships from close relatives, fearing that disclosure could lead to condemnation, conflict, or loss of trust. A pervasive fear of rejection or withdrawal of familial support further complicated their interactions, leaving participants in a precarious position of balancing secrecy with the need for emotional and practical support from their families.

Economic and Personal Independence Dimension

The economic and personal independence dimension highlighted the intersection between financial realities and

relational dynamics. For some participants, economic dependency on sexual partners emerged as a significant factor, particularly in cases where limited resources restricted their autonomy. In other narratives, relationships were strategically used to secure relative material comfort, suggesting that economic motivations were interwoven with emotional and sexual decisions. At the same time, many participants articulated a conscious effort to achieve economic independence, framing their post-divorce relationships as opportunities to exercise greater decision-making power. Women who managed to establish themselves financially described experiencing a heightened sense of authority and control in their relationships, contrasting sharply with those who remained dependent. This dimension underscored the dual role of sexuality as both a coping mechanism and a potential path toward greater autonomy.

Coping Strategies and Personal Reconstruction Dimension

The final dimension, coping strategies and personal reconstruction, illuminated the diverse ways women sought to manage the emotional, social, and cultural complexities of their experiences. Spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, or religious rituals were described as vital sources of comfort and resilience, helping participants cope with guilt and social pressure. Others turned to expressive outlets such as journaling or sharing experiences with trusted friends, which provided emotional release and validation. Although counseling and professional support were not widely utilized, some participants reported seeking limited guidance from psychologists or confidants. Over time, many women spoke of gradually accepting their new relational realities as part of their reconstructed post-divorce identities, reframing multiple relationships not as failures but as steps toward growth. Importantly, several participants described a forward-looking orientation, emphasizing their efforts to find healthier, more emotionally stable relationships that could integrate intimacy with respect and mutual understanding.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the complex psychological, social, familial, economic, and identity-related dimensions that divorced women experience when engaging in multiple sexual relationships after divorce. The phenomenological analysis demonstrated that participants' narratives were filled with paradoxical emotions, ranging

from empowerment and self-discovery to guilt, anxiety, and fear of social stigma. These results suggest that sexual relationships in the aftermath of divorce are not simply private choices but socially embedded practices that reflect broader structural inequalities, cultural expectations, and gendered double standards.

One of the most significant findings relates to the psychological and emotional dimensions of post-divorce experiences. Participants frequently described loneliness, ambivalence, and emotional confusion when navigating new relationships. These results align with studies demonstrating that emotional divorce or the breakdown of intimacy within marriage has profound implications for women's mental health, leading to vulnerability in subsequent intimate encounters (Al-shahrani & Hammad, 2023a, 2023b). Similarly, research on attachment styles and sexual functioning has shown that women with unresolved emotional bonds or low emotional intelligence are at heightened risk of experiencing distress when entering new sexual relationships (Khorami et al., 2021). In this sense, the results support the notion that divorce disrupts emotional continuity and increases the likelihood of both positive and negative psychological outcomes, depending on how individuals reconstruct their identity and coping strategies.

The social and cultural dimensions revealed through this study underscore the stigma and secrecy that divorced women must manage when engaging in multiple sexual relationships. Participants emphasized how societal pressures forced them to conceal their relationships, fearing rejection or judgment from their families and communities. These findings are consistent with scholarship showing that divorced women face harsher societal scrutiny compared to men, often being labeled in ways that undermine their dignity and autonomy (Desmaisi et al., 2019; Stokes et al., 2019). In Turkey and Russia, similar patterns have been observed where divorce intersects with fertility and employment, intensifying stigma and limiting women's opportunities (Sinelnikov, 2019; Telatar, 2019). Moreover, studies on concurrent partnerships in Ghana and England emphasize how secrecy and stigma shape relational practices, reinforcing the observation that women's post-divorce sexual behaviors are heavily mediated by cultural norms (Cassels et al., 2019; Wayal et al., 2020). Thus, the results demonstrate that cultural frameworks play a central role in shaping divorced women's capacity to express intimacy, creating ambivalence between personal autonomy and collective morality.

Another important result relates to the reconstruction of identity and gender roles after divorce. Women in this study described new forms of self-perception, where proving femininity, reclaiming control over their bodies, and redefining independence became central aspects of their experiences. This resonates with literature suggesting that divorce can catalyze identity transformation, particularly for women who move beyond traditional expectations of wifehood or motherhood (Hombrados & Özcan, 2023; Zhang, 2022). The conflict between personal desire and social expectations observed in this study reflects global trends, where women navigate gendered pressures while seeking empowerment through relational autonomy (Cirtel, 2022; Gen et al., 2021). Historical and sociological studies also confirm that divorce has long functioned as a site of renegotiation of gendered power relations, whether in early modern England or in contemporary multicultural contexts (Kesseling & Stretton, 2022; Tsang, 2021). Thus, the results contribute to the broader understanding of how divorced women reassert agency in the face of persistent patriarchal structures.

Family dynamics also emerged as an essential theme in this study. Participants described strained ties with their families of origin, concerns about the impact of their relationships on children, and fears of losing family support if their behaviors were disclosed. These findings align with scholarship indicating that divorce has intergenerational effects, particularly in shaping children's marital well-being and sexual development (Wang & Mu, 2025; Zhang, 2022). The narratives also resonate with research from Indonesia and Malawi, which demonstrates that divorce reshapes women's integration into family and community life, often resulting in weakened social ties and economic vulnerability (Jannah, 2023; McLean et al., 2024). Furthermore, studies on early marriage and marital stability in China show that family systems remain central in regulating women's intimate lives, both during and after marriage (Hombrados & Özcan, 2023). Collectively, these insights reinforce that family plays a dual role: both as a protective structure and as a site of constraint, shaping the lived realities of divorced women.

Economic realities were another critical dimension highlighted by the participants. Some women described dependency on sexual partners for financial support, while others used relationships strategically to secure material comfort or to achieve economic independence. These results echo studies from Germany and Sweden that highlight the gendered financial consequences of divorce, where women

often face lower pension incomes and reduced economic security (Schmauk & Kridahl, 2024). In Turkey, divorce has been empirically linked to women's employment, underscoring how economic conditions shape post-divorce trajectories (Telatar, 2019). Similarly, historical and contemporary evidence suggests that women's economic autonomy is closely tied to their ability to negotiate relational power and independence (Parsakia & Darbani, 2022; Payne, 2021). Participants' experiences of empowerment through financial independence resonate with these findings, indicating that economic self-sufficiency is a central factor in determining whether post-divorce relationships are experienced as liberating or exploitative.

The findings also revealed diverse coping strategies and forms of personal reconstruction. Women described turning to spirituality, journaling, counseling, or gradual acceptance of new relational norms as ways of managing stigma and emotional turmoil. These strategies are consistent with literature highlighting resilience and adaptive coping in the face of marital breakdown (Mohamadian et al., 2024; Torki & Etemadi, 2024). In many contexts, religious or spiritual practices provide divorced women with a framework for meaning-making and emotional regulation, as shown in studies on emotional divorce and alexithymia in Saudi Arabia (Al-shahrani & Hammad, 2023a). Other research emphasizes the importance of counseling and therapeutic interventions, which can help women reconstruct identity and navigate post-divorce transitions (Parsakia & Darbani, 2022). Coping, therefore, is not only an individual psychological process but also a socially embedded strategy that reflects cultural, spiritual, and institutional resources.

Taken together, the findings of this study underscore the multidimensionality of divorced women's experiences in engaging with multiple sexual relationships. On the one hand, these relationships offer opportunities for self-expression, identity reconstruction, and economic independence. On the other hand, they expose women to stigma, emotional confusion, and potential exploitation. Aligning with previous research, the results affirm that divorce is both a disruptive and transformative process, embedded in psychological vulnerabilities, family systems, cultural expectations, and structural inequalities (Blasutto, 2023; Hogendoorn & Berg, 2024). By adopting a phenomenological approach, this study has illuminated the subjective meanings and lived realities of divorced women, contributing to the broader literature on marriage, divorce, and gendered experiences across diverse contexts.

5. Limitations and Suggestions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. The sample size was relatively small, consisting of only ten participants, which limits the ability to generalize findings to broader populations of divorced women. The study was also conducted in a specific cultural and geographical context, where local norms, religious frameworks, and community structures may differ significantly from other regions. The reliance on self-reported narratives introduces potential biases, such as selective disclosure or memory distortion, especially given the sensitive nature of discussing sexual relationships. Additionally, the phenomenological approach, while valuable for capturing depth and meaning, may underrepresent structural factors such as legal systems, institutional support, or economic policies that shape post-divorce experiences. Finally, the role of male partners in these relationships was not examined, leaving unexplored perspectives that could have enriched the understanding of relational dynamics.

Future studies should expand the sample size and include participants from diverse cultural, socioeconomic, and geographical backgrounds to explore cross-cultural variations in post-divorce experiences. Comparative research across societies with different legal and religious frameworks could provide deeper insight into how structural factors mediate women's choices and coping strategies. Quantitative studies could complement qualitative findings by measuring the prevalence of multiple sexual relationships among divorced women and linking them to psychological, social, and economic outcomes. Longitudinal designs would be particularly useful to trace how women's experiences evolve over time, from the immediate aftermath of divorce to later stages of life. Moreover, future research should incorporate perspectives of male partners, children, and extended family members to construct a more holistic picture of post-divorce relational dynamics.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the urgent need for targeted support systems for divorced women. Counseling services should be tailored to address both the emotional consequences of divorce and the social stigma associated with multiple sexual relationships. Programs that integrate psychological support with economic empowerment initiatives could help reduce financial dependency and enhance women's autonomy. Legal and policy reforms are also necessary to protect divorced women from discrimination, stigmatization, and

economic marginalization. Community-based awareness campaigns could play a vital role in challenging harmful stereotypes and promoting more inclusive attitudes toward divorced women. Finally, professionals in family counseling, mental health, and social services should be trained to adopt culturally sensitive and gender-responsive approaches that acknowledge the complexities of women's lived experiences after divorce.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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