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Understanding Suicidal Behaviour Among Divorced Women in Northern Nigeria: A Qualitative Study of Contributing Factors

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Abstract

Background

Across both historical and contemporary theories of suicidal thoughts and behaviours, social disconnection, including divorce, has consistently been identified as major risk factors for suicide. Suicidal ideation among divorced women represents an important but underexplored public health concern, particularly in Northern Nigeria where divorce is often accompanied by social stigma, economic hardship, and gendered expectations that shape women's lived realities. This study explored factors contributing to suicidal ideation among divorced women in Kano State, Nigeria.

Methods

A qualitative study guided by an interpretive phenomenological approach was conducted among 12 divorced women purposively selected from communities within Kano metropolis. Data were collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Transcribed interviews were analysed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach. The analysis focused on participants perceptions regarding factors contributing to suicidal ideation after divorce.

Results

Three interconnected themes emerged from the data; Living through emotional devastation following marital breakdown, Economic hardship as a source of distress, and Social Stigma. The sub-themes include; Psychological exhaustion, and Internalized guilt.

Conclusions

Participants' accounts revealed that suicidal ideation did not arise from a single event but evolved through the cumulative experience of emotional suffering, financial strain, and social exclusion following divorce. These experiences were often described as creating a sense of entrapment, hopelessness, and diminished self-worth, making thoughts of death appear as a means of escaping overwhelming distress. Strengthening mental health services, social protection programs, culturally sensitive suicide prevention strategies and community-based interventions will help reduce suicidal vulnerability among divorced women in Northern Nigeria.

Background

The global goal to reduce suicide rate by one third by 2030 set by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015) and the World health organisation [WHO] Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan (2021) faces significant challenges due to rising suicide rates in Low- and middle-income

countries [LMICs] [1]. Although suicide occurs across all regions and socioeconomic groups, nearly 80% of suicide deaths occur in LMICs where mental health resources are often limited and stigma surrounding mental illness remains widespread [2]. Nigeria, having a population exceeding 200 million is a focal point for suicide cases globally, with the current rate at 12.50 per 100, 000 people exceeding the global average of 9.0 per 100,000 [3].

While men account for a higher proportion of suicide deaths globally, Women representing a particularly vulnerable population consistently report higher rates of suicidal ideation and non-fatal suicide attempts [4]. Evidence suggests that women in LMICs are disproportionately exposed to psychosocial stressors such as poverty, gender inequality, domestic violence, marital instability, and social exclusion, all of which contribute to increased psychological distress and suicidal vulnerability [5]. Among these stressors, divorce has been identified as an important yet understudied determinant of suicidal behaviours because it extends beyond the legal termination of marriage to encompass the loss of emotional connectedness, social identity, economic stability, and social support systems [6].

The association between divorce and suicidal thought and behaviours is well established in both theoretical and empirical literature, which suggests that the loss of social integration, belongingness, and interpersonal connectedness accompanying marital dissolution heightens vulnerability to suicidal thoughts and behaviours [7, 8]. Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated elevated suicide risk among divorced individuals, seeing it as a traumatic life crisis [9], with research indicating significantly higher rates of suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and suicide mortality compared with married populations [6, 10]. For example, a study in Kermanshah, Iran, found that 34.7% of divorced women were at high risk of suicidal ideation, 49.2% at low risk, and 16.1% had none [11]. Other longitudinal data shows divorced people are nearly twice as likely as married people to attempt suicide even after adjustment, and the first year after divorce carries the highest risk [5, 20].

These concerns are particularly relevant in Northern Nigeria, where religious, cultural, and socioeconomic factors strongly shape gender roles, family dynamics, and women's social status [12]. In Kano State, one of Nigeria's largest and most culturally conservative states, marriage is widely regarded as a marker of womanhood, social respectability, and economic security [13]. Yet, the state has one of the highest divorce rates in Northern Nigeria, with approximately 32% of marriages reportedly ending within the first few months of union [14, 15]. Within this context, patriarchal norms, limited economic opportunities for women, and strong communal expectations amplify the psychological consequences of marital dissolution [16]. Following divorce, many women experience stigma, social exclusion, financial hardship, reduced prospects for remarriage, and diminished opportunities for social reintegration, while also bearing the emotional burden of disrupted intimate relationships [17, 19]. These intersecting experiences are recognized as important contributors to suicidal behaviours, with evidence consistently linking divorce-related suicidality to recent relationship disruption, depression, hopelessness, inadequate social support, violence, poverty, and the challenges of single parenthood [5, 10, 18].

However, despite the potential psychological consequences of these experiences, the pathways through which divorce contributes to suicidal ideation remain insufficiently understood, particularly among women living within sociocultural environments where marital status strongly influences social identity and community acceptance. little is known about how divorced women in Kano State experience, interpret, and cope with suicidal thoughts and behaviours. Existing research has largely focused on prevalence estimates, psychiatric correlates, and demographic risk factors associated with divorce [17, 21, 22, 23]. Few studies have explored the experiences of divorced women who have experienced suicidal behaviours, particularly within culturally conservative settings where divorce and suicide remain highly stigmatized. Understanding these experiences is essential for developing culturally responsive suicide prevention strategies and mental health interventions. This study therefore, seeks to explore the experiences of suicidal ideation among divorced women in Kano State, Nigeria, with particular focus to contributing factors.

Methods

Study Design

A qualitative design using an interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological approach was employed to explore the experiences of suicidal ideation among divorced women in Kano State, Nigeria. Interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to understand how individuals make meaning of their lived experiences within their sociocultural contexts [24]. This approach was considered appropriate because suicidal behaviours are complex, sensitive, and deeply influenced by personal, social, and cultural experiences. The study was informed by a social constructionist philosophical perspective, which assumes that meanings and realities are socially constructed through interactions, cultural norms, religious beliefs, and shared understandings [25]. Within this framework, experiences of divorce, social exclusion, and suicidal behaviours were understood as phenomena shaped by the sociocultural environment of Northern Nigeria.

Setting

The study was conducted in Kano State, North-western Nigeria. Kano is one of the most populous states in Nigeria and serves as the commercial hub of Northern Nigeria. The state is predominantly inhabited by Hausa-Fulani Muslims and is characterized by strong cultural and religious values that place considerable importance on marriage and family life [26]. Within this sociocultural context, divorce often carries significant social consequences for women, including stigma, social exclusion, and economic vulnerability [17]. These characteristics made Kano State an appropriate setting for exploring the experiences of divorced women who had experienced suicidal behaviours.

Participants

Participants comprised divorced women residing in Kano State who had experienced suicidal behaviours, including suicidal ideation, suicide planning, or suicide attempts following divorce. Eligibility criteria included women aged 18–49 years who had been divorced for at least six months through legal, religious, or customary processes and who self-reported a history of suicidal behaviour occurring during or after divorce. Women who were experiencing an acute suicidal crisis at the time of data collection, or diagnosed with severe mental disorders that impaired their ability to provide informed consent or participate meaningfully in interviews, women who had remarried, and women divorced for less than six months were excluded from the study. The sample size was guided by the principle of data saturation, whereby recruitment continued until no new themes or meaningful insights emerged from subsequent interviews [27]. A total of 12 divorced women with direct experience of suicidal behaviour were purposively recruited. Initial recruitment was facilitated through community gatekeepers, including the Kano State Hisbah Board and women's support groups. Thereafter, snowball sampling was employed, with participants referring other eligible women who met the study's inclusion criteria.

Table 1
Descriptive characteristics of participants based on self-report

Participants	Age	Education	Occupation	No of children	Suicidal Ideation	Attempt	Mental Health Diagnosis
P1	26–29	Informal	unemployed	1	Present	Nil	Nil
P2	41–49	Informal	Petty trader	8	Present	Nil	Nil
P3	30–39	O' Level	Petty trader	2	Present	Nil	Nil
P4	31–39	Informal	House help	1	Present	Nil	Nil
P5	30–39	Informal	Petty trader	3	Present	Nil	Nil
P6	31–39	Informal	Hair stylist	6	Present	Nil	Nil
P7	33–39	NCE	Teaching	2	Present	Nil	Mild depression
P8	36–39	Diploma	Entrepreneur	2	Present	Nil	Nil
P9	31–39	Informal	Cook	6	Present	Nil	Nil
P10	27–29	Tertiary	Entrepreneur	1	Present	Nil	Post-partum Depression
P11	29–35	O' Level	Petty trader	Nil	Present	Nil	Nil
P12	34–39	NCE	Teacher	2	Strong ideation	Nil	Nil

Data Collection

Data were collected using semi-structured, in-depth face to face interviews conducted by the researcher who is fluent in both Hausa and English. The guide was developed specifically for this study and was informed by the study objectives and relevant literature on suicidal behaviours, divorce, stigma, social support, and coping. Although concepts and question areas were adapted from existing literature [28], the interview guide was not adopted from or previously published as a complete instrument. The English-language version of the interview guide is provided as Supplementary File 2. Data were collected from 30th October, 2025, to 10th January, 2026. The mean time of the interviews was 45–60 min. The

guide explored participants' experiences of suicidal behaviours following divorce. Interviews were conducted at locations selected by participants to ensure privacy and comfort. Each interview commenced with broad, open-ended questions “What was it like to go through divorce?” This was followed by probing questions such as, “What emotions were you experiencing at that time?” A series of potential prompts were used, including, “What factors do you believe contributed…” and “Tell me more about…”. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and supplemented with field notes documenting non-verbal expressions, contextual observations, and researcher reflections. Afterwards the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and coded. The structured coding system allowed for rigorous data organization and analysis while maintaining participant confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using thematic analysis following the six-step framework proposed by Braun and Clarke [29]. (1) Familiarization with the Data: All interview transcripts were thoroughly read (during transcription) and re-read to ensure deep understanding. (2) Generating Initial Codes: Relevant features of the data were systematically coded across the entire dataset. Each participant was assigned a unique alphanumeric code consisting of a number and a letter. The number represented the participant’s sequence in the study (e.g., “1” for the first, “2” for the second, up to “12” for the twelved participant), while the letter indicated the order of the extracted codes from that participant. For example, the code “1B” referred to the second code derived from participant 1. (3**)** Searching for Themes: The generated codes were reviewed to identify broader patterns of meaning. Codes sharing similar ideas were grouped together to form potential sub-themes and themes, such as *psychological exhaustion (Living through emotional devastation after marital breakdown*). (4) Reviewing Themes: The preliminary themes were examined in relation to the coded extracts and the overall dataset to ensure coherence and consistency. (5) Defining and Naming Themes: Each finalized theme was clearly defined and named to capture its essence and significance to the study objectives. (6) Producing the Report: The final stage involved putting together the narrative with relevant excerpts from participants’ accounts.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established through measures aimed at ensuring credibility and dependability. Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with participants, the use of probing questions during interviews, and member checking, whereby participants were given opportunities to clarify and verify aspects of their narratives. Dependability was ensured through the maintenance of an audit trail documenting methodological decisions, coding procedures, and theme development. In addition, selected transcripts and coding frameworks were independently reviewed by qualitative research experts to ensure consistency between participant accounts and thematic interpretations.

Strategies used to ensure rigor and trustworthiness

- **Credibility:** Prolonged engagement and persistent observation during interviews, and use of verbatim participant quotes to illustrate findings.
- **Dependability:** An audit trail of coding decisions and reflexive memos was maintained.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Kano State Ministry of Health Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number: NHREC/17/03/2018). Permission to access communities was obtained from relevant community leaders and gatekeepers. Participants received complete written information about the scope of the research, the identity and affiliation of the researchers, the possibility of withdrawing from the study at any point, confidentiality, and all other information required in accordance with the **Helsinki Declaration, as revised in 1989 [30]**. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Given the sensitive nature of discussing suicidal behaviours, interviews were conducted with particular attention to participants' emotional wellbeing. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study by removing identifying information from transcripts and assigning pseudonyms to participants. All data were securely stored and were accessible only to the researcher. After completing the interview, participants received a small non-coercive token of appreciation.

Results

Table 2: Themes and sub-themes

OBECTIVE	THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Factors contributing to suicidal behaviour among divorced women	Living through emotional devastation after marital breakdown	- Psychological exhaustion -Internalized guilt
	Economic hardship as a source of distress	
	Social Stigma	

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants. The mean age of 31.6 years (range: 26–41 years). Most participants had limited formal education and were engaged in informal or low-income occupations, reflecting the socioeconomic vulnerability of the study population. The majority had dependent children, ranging from one to eight, while one participant had no children. All participants reported experiencing suicidal ideation, although none had a history of suicide attempts. Only two participants had a documented mental health diagnosis (mild depression and postpartum depression), whereas the remaining participants reported no previous mental health diagnosis.

From **Table 2,** Three themes and two sub-themes emerged from the narratives of the 12 participants in the study. Each theme represents a distinct expression of their experiences, capturing the deeper meaning and understanding of their collective journey.

Theme I

Living through emotional devastation after marital breakdown

This theme captures the intense emotional and mental strain experienced by divorced women following marital dissolution. The narratives reflected a profound sense of hopelessness that developed as participants struggled to rebuild their lives.

Sub-theme 1: Psychological exhaustion

For many women, the emotional consequences of divorce extended beyond sadness to feelings of complete psychological exhaustion. Feelings such as *"devastation," "hopelessness," "life crumbling,"* and *"overwhelming pressure"* were recurrent. The transition from married life to single motherhood, coupled with societal expectations of women to maintain their marriages at all costs, created internalized guilt and emotional collapse.

"And after my divorce I became miserable due to the way people treat me, I always stay indoors, at some point I stopped relating with people because they always have one thing or the other to say to you regarding your divorce". ***(Participant 7)***

Some women traced their overwhelming despair to the treatment they received upon returning to their family homes after the divorce, describing how the coldness, tension, and lack of acceptance deepened their emotional wounds.

"Every new day brings a different kind of struggle. Even finding food for me and my son feels almost impossible, and we just take whatever we are given as if I'm not even their child. When my siblings beat my son for no reason, I stand there helpless. And even when I complain, my mother tells me to go back to my failed marriage because they don't have much to spare. Moments like this make me feel completely hopeless." ***(Participant 5)***

"Do you know what it means to live with your own mother like a co-wife? That's what my life has become in this house. She cooks her food separately, and I cook mine separately. We quarrel over the smallest things. ***Kai…****" (she makes an overwhelming gesture, eyes almost filled with tears) "I don't pray for anyone to live like this."* ***(Participant 6)***

Sub-theme 2: Internalized guilt

Many internalized the failure of their marriages, describing persistent guilt over their children, and family expectations. For several women, these overwhelming emotions culminated in recurrent thoughts of

death, not necessarily from a desire to end their lives, but as a perceived escape from unbearable emotional pain. Expressions such as *"I wished I was dead," "I felt like dying,"* and *"I prayed for God to take my life"* reflected the depth of their despair and the psychological burden they carried following divorce.

"Sometimes when I look at my kids I feel guilty, seeing them grow up without a father figure in their life is traumatizing, people think it's my fault that I have not re-married, they say am being choosy. But I don't want to make the same mistake I did in my previous marriage." ***(Participant 8)***

"Yes, I felt like dying when my children were taken away from me. My ex-husband suddenly came back and demanded that I return the children to him, my youngest was just eight months old. In that moment, it felt like my whole world was collapsing. I thought of dying every single day. I wished I was dead. I couldn't eat or drink; I was constantly crying." (Participant 1)

"Yes, it did. In fact, I even prayed for God to take my life at some point. I was tired, truly tired, because many of the men who came seeking my hand again were not sincere at all. Some of them would make inappropriate advances, behaving as if my divorce made me available for anything they wanted." (Participant 5).

"*Those were the most difficult moment of my life. The thought of death always crosses my mind especially immediately after the divorce, it was devastating."* ***(Participant 4)***

In some extreme cases, participants expressed violent ideation linked to forced reconciliation. However, spiritual beliefs served as a boundary that prevented these thoughts from becoming actions.

*"**Of course, especially when they kept pressuring me to return to my husband's house. My family and my uncles insisted that I must go back, but I told them plainly that if I went back, I would kill him and kill myself. Only then did they finally give me some breathing space.**" (Participant 6).*

Theme II

Economic hardship as an enduring source of distress

This theme captures the pervasive financial vulnerability experienced by divorced women following marital dissolution. Participants described a sharp decline in economic stability marked by loss of financial support, and unstable income sources. Economic strain was intensified by the absence of institutional or familial assistance, leaving many women solely responsible for meeting basic household needs. Women described daily struggles to meet basic needs such as food, childcare, rent, and school fees. Some ex-husbands provided highly inconsistent support, sometimes as low as N8,000 a month. While others contributed nothing. These financial constraints compounded emotional stress, and heightened feelings of helplessness.

*"**My major challenge is finances. I lost my father, and now it's only my mother taking care of us. But she focuses mainly on the younger ones because, in their eyes, I'm already 'old enough' to cater for myself, even though I'm struggling on my own.**" **(Participant 2)***

"After my divorce I became miserable… the financial challenges was huge."
(Participant 5)

However, participants who had formal education were either employed or running their own businesses, they generally did not experience the same level of financial difficulty as others without formal education. Their background provided them with greater stability, allowing them to earn income and manage their needs independently. Some had parents who offered consistent support, while others stood firmly on their own, using their skills and economic independence to navigate life after divorce without severe financial strain.

"I never experienced any financial strain. My parents were always there for me, providing everything I needed. Financial hardship was never an issue for me." ***(Participant 7)***

Theme III

Social Stigma

This theme reflects the entrenched societal stigma attached to divorce, where marital status strongly shapes women's social identity and moral worth. Participants reported being subjected to negative labelling, gossip, and continuous community surveillance that framed divorce as personal failure. Such scrutiny restricted social interaction, fostered self-consciousness, and encouraged withdrawal from communal life. Divorced women described being viewed through a moralistic and negative lens. Common experiences included being labelled as "promiscuous," "a failure," or "a woman who could not keep a home." Such moral judgment contributed to internal shame, emotional pain, and heightened vulnerability to depressive thoughts.

"Yes, I did experience stigma from people in my neighbourhood. They kept saying the divorce was my fault that I was the one who refused to stay in my husband's house, as if they understood the real reasons my marriage ended." ***(Participant 3)***

"Yes, it's painful. People keep saying the end of my marriage was my fault. Whenever my children are seen, fingers are pointed at them and people whisper, 'their mother is not with their father.' It hurts me deeply." ***(Participant 8)***

"Sometimes the comments hurt more than the divorce itself. They say things like, 'She couldn't keep a home,' and hearing that repeatedly as a woman is devastating." ***(Participant 12)***

Others explained how community members monitor their movements, make assumptions about their morality, and gossip about them. Simple interactions with men like greeting were misinterpreted. These experiences created a culture of constant scrutiny, limiting their freedom and increasing anxiety and self-consciousness.

"Well, from my family the stigma is minimal, but in the community, it is a different story. People look at you as if you are promiscuous simply because you don't have a husband and you're living on your own. They point fingers and judge you. There was even a woman who called me a prostitute". (Participant 6)

Discussion

The study focused on understanding the underlying factors associated with suicidal behaviour among divorced women within the socio-cultural context of Kano State. The findings indicate that suicidal ideation emerged not from a single precipitating event but from the cumulative interaction of emotional devastation following marital dissolution, post-divorce economic hardship, and persistent social stigma. These experiences were shaped by the sociocultural norms of Northern Nigeria, where marriage is closely tied to women's identity, social acceptance, and economic security [12]. Collectively, the findings suggest that divorce initiates a cascade of psychological, economic, and social stressors that increases vulnerability to suicidal thoughts. Three themes and two sub-themes emerged from the narratives of the 12 participants in the study.

One of the most striking findings was the profound emotional devastation experienced by participants immediately after divorce. Women described intense psychological exhaustion characterised by hopelessness, grief, guilt, loneliness, and emotional collapse. For many, divorce represented not merely the end of a marital relationship but the loss of identity, security, companionship, and future aspirations. These findings support the Interpersonal Psychological Theory of Suicide, which proposes that experiences of thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness contribute to suicidal desire [8]. The emotional suffering described by participants reflects the psychological consequences of losing an important social bond while simultaneously feeling rejected by family and society.

Studies in line with this [31, 32] highlighted that divorced women experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, and emotional instability compared to married women, a pattern observed in the current findings. The emotional breakdown described by participants through feelings of devastation, hopelessness, and life "crumbling" consistent with previous qualitative studies of Ardi and Maizura (2018) and Shabuddin et al. (2016), who identified sadness, frustration, self-blame, and fear as major psychological consequences of divorce [33, 34]. However, the emotional distress reported in this study appears to be intensified by cultural expectations unique to the study settings, where divorce is more commonly interpreted as a woman's failure to maintain her home [35]. This expectation places disproportionate pressure on women, often resulting in guilt, shame, and internalized stigma, particularly for those returning to unsupportive or hostile family environments.

Although none of the women reported actual suicide attempts, many described passive suicidal ideation, expressing wishes for death, daily thoughts of dying, or prayers to God to end their suffering. These expressions are consistent with global findings that divorced women are at significantly higher risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviours. Edwards et al. (2023), for example, found that divorced women had a 2.5 times higher likelihood of suicide attempts, driven by emotional turmoil and lack of support [5]. The present study extends this understanding by highlighting how religious and cultural norms influence the expression of suicidal intent. In Kano, a predominantly Muslim society, suicide is considered a major religious sin. Thus, suicidal thoughts are often framed passively ("I prayed for God to take my life") rather than through active planning [42]. This cultural framing masks the severity of psychological distress and helps explain why suicidal behaviour is underreported in this region.

Economic hardship emerged as another important factor underpinning suicidal ideation among participants. Most women reported losing financial security immediately after divorce and becoming solely responsible for providing food, housing, healthcare, and education for their children despite limited employment opportunities, this may be attributed to the failure of some ex-husbands to provide the financial and material support expected of them, despite their continued parental responsibilities. Similar patterns have been observed by Suleiman (2023) who linked economic hardship to mental health deterioration after divorce [36]. The reason being that in the study setting marriage is closely tied to women's economic security, divorce often results in an abrupt loss of financial protection traditionally provided by husbands [37]. Many participants were suddenly expected to meet basic household needs without stable income or external support. The findings from the study of Adebayo et al. (2022), stated that 52% of women who attempted suicide identified lack of financial support and child-related stressors as major triggers [38]. However, women with formal education reported relatively less financial difficulty, because their status of being educated facilitated access to income-generating activities, self-employment, and financial decision-making, which reduced dependence on former spouses. Previous studies demonstrated education and employable skills enhance women's economic resilience and buffer against psychological distress following marital dissolution [39, 40].

Social stigma and community judgement were pervasive throughout participants' narratives and represented another important contributor to suicidal ideation. Many women described being labelled as irresponsible, promiscuous, or incapable of sustaining a marriage. Others reported being constantly watched, criticised, or judged by members of their communities, leading them to withdraw from social interactions. These experiences illustrate how divorce extends beyond a private family event to become a public social identity that attracts condemnation and discrimination [41]. This aligns with the study of Qamar who found that divorced women frequently experience name-calling, loss of social networks, and disrespect from family and peers [42]. However, the findings of this study show that stigma in Kano takes on a more morally charged and religiously framed dimension. Women were not only criticized but were subjected to intense moral surveillance, where their movements, greetings, and interactions especially with men were interpreted as signs of promiscuity.

This pattern is seen in the study of Lazarus et al. (2017), who noted that women in Northern Nigeria face harsher social penalties because marriage is strongly tied to family honour and female chastity [43]. Divorce, therefore, becomes a perceived moral failure, with divorced women seen as deviating from expected gender norms. The current study supports this understanding by showing how such scrutiny leads to sustained anxiety, internal shame, and social withdrawal, factors that directly contribute to depressive symptoms and passive suicidal ideation [17]. The psychological consequences of stigma in the current study shows similar patterns observed in Pakistan in the study of Razaq et al., 2025, where women reported severe emotional and physical distress linked to societal judgment [44]. Yet, unlike Razaq's participants, many of whom found resilience in spirituality participants in the current study often experienced religious interpretations as a source of comfort but also a reminder of societal expectations that they were judged to have failed. These findings further support Joiner's theory that weakened social integration increases suicide risk and underscore the importance of community-level interventions aimed at reducing stigma and promoting social inclusion [8].

These limitations should be noted. The study was limited by its focus on a relatively small sample drawn from a single geographical location, which may limit generalizability to other states or regions. The exclusive inclusion of women excluded potential comparative insights with divorced men experiencing similar stressors. Relying solely on self-reported narratives may have introduced emotional, recall, or social desirability bias.

Conclusion

This study identified variables that contributes to suicidal behaviour among divorced women, such as psychological, financial, and social, challenges. Divorced women experienced intense emotional exhaustion marked by distress, hopelessness, and recurring suicidal thoughts, largely driven by overwhelming responsibilities, financial strain, and the abrupt transition to single motherhood. Social stigma further deepened their distress, as community labelling, moral surveillance, and gendered assumptions reinforced feelings of shame, isolation, and diminished self-worth. The absence of emotional, financial, and institutional support exposed significant gaps in family and community responsiveness, leaving many divorced women to navigate their struggles in isolation.

Recommendations

Policymakers should strengthen existing legal and social protections for divorced women through ensuring accessible mechanisms for reporting harassment, abuse, and neglect by ex-partners. Courts, and social welfare agencies should also streamline processes for child-support enforcement, custody protection, and safe mediation, so as to reducing the likelihood that women are compelled to return to harmful relationships because of financial or social pressures. Targeted economic empowerment programmes should be expanded for divorced women, with emphasis on vocational skills training, entrepreneurship development, and accessible business grants or start-up support. Strengthening women's financial independence will go a long way in reducing economic vulnerability following divorce.

Finally, accessible, culturally sensitive psychological support should be integrated with appropriate spiritual counselling to help women manage emotional distress, reduce suicidal thoughts, strengthen resilience, and foster hope and adaptive adjustment during the post-divorce period.

Abbreviations

LMICs- Low-and Middle-Income-Countries

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Kano State Ministry of Health Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number: NHREC/17/03/2018). Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection after the complete written information about the scope of the research, the identity and affiliation of the researchers, the possibility of withdrawing from the study at any point, confidentiality, and all other information required in accordance with the **Helsinki Declaration, as revised in 1989 [30],** was read to the participants.

Consent for publication

Not applicable

Availability of data and materials

The data set collected from this study is available upon request from the corresponding author.

Competing interest

The authors declare no competing interest exist.

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None

Authors' contribution

JHU conceptualized the study, adapted the tool, followed the data collection process, performed analysis, and prepared the final draft. MHH and LMA critically revised and made adjustment to the final paper. All authors read and approved the final manuscript for submission.

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- DivorcedWomenAxialCodingDataset1.xlsx
- Interviewguide.docx
- Additionalfiles.docx