

Reconstructing Everyday Life After Divorce: A Qualitative Study of Urban Divorced Mothers

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Abstract

Beyond the legal dissolution of a marriage, divorce can reshape the economic, caregiving, social and emotional infrastructure of everyday life for mothers. However, there is limited qualitative evidence on the way in which divorced mothers cope with these overlapping transitions in Northeast India. The present study adopts qualitative multiple case study design to investigate the Post Divorce experiences of 50 mothers of Aizawl, Mizoram. Six themes that were interconnected emerged from the cross-case thematic analysis: economic hardship and the burden of motherhood; reorganisation of gender and household roles; intensified and child-centred motherhood; identity reconstruction and experience of social judgements and unwelcomeness; psychological distress and emotional adjustment; and kinship support, coping and resilience. The results indicate that divorce often led mothers in concentrating more on the work of earning a living, child care and make a large decision-making in the absence of the spouse. Employment also provided an avenue for independence, while social difficulty is frequently felt not as a direct exclusion, but as an anticipatory judgement, as intrusive questioning which implies self-exclusion. Mothers' stories also show a great deal of distress such as anxiety, loneliness, trauma and, in a small number, suicidal feelings. The study views post-divorce as a regular family reconstruction process characterised by vulnerability and agency and calls for support systems that tackle issues of care, income, mental health, child maintenance and social belonging in a one-stop manner rather than individualistic manner.

1. Introduction

Divorce is referred to as a change of the marital status, but that only describes a portion of the divorce process (Brown & Lin, 2022). Marital breakup can affect the division of labour in terms of earning, caring, decision making, residence and the negotiation and understanding of social roles, for women who keep on carrying the primary responsibilities of caring for children (Ali et al., 2022; Audila et al., 2026). Marriage can thus be understood as a process of reorganisation of everyday family life taking place at its end, instead of a legal or relational act (Uprety, 2024).

This distinction is important because post-divorce disadvantage is seldom limited to just one domain. A decrease or instability in household income can coincide with a rise in childcare responsibilities (Attiq-UL-Rehman & Shahzadi, 2025). Jobs can help women become more financially independent, but leave less time for children (Turmudi, 2025). At the same time, a mother can be empowered to make decisions in her own life, while also feeling lonely and experiencing social judgement or fear of the future with her children. In this way, all of these experiences of the economy, society, taking care and caring, and psychology are intertwined; pressures in one area can lead to pressures in others.

But in recent scholarship, a more nuanced view is beginning to emerge that treats divorced motherhood as an undifferentiated state (Almog & Herbst-Debby, 2025; T. L. et al., 2025). In their qualitative, life-course approach, (Moles & Bernardi, 2026) suggest that lone parenthood is a fluid, complex phenomenon which occurs when stressors combine with resources across domains including:

employment, childcare, housing and health. The Indian context entails the sociocultural dimension. Recent systematic review of studies on the effects of divorce on women in India has revealed some consistent findings such as psychological problems, economic distress, child-related issues, social stigma, legal issues and family problems (Ottakkam Thodukayil et al., 2026). Resilience and challenges to social, economic, cultural and psychological aspects are also recorded in qualitative work with divorced women in Kashmir (Khan & Hamid, 2021).

But India is not a homogeneous society and culture. Divorce is understood in local kinship context, in terms of gender expectations, in religious institutions, customary arrangements, in labour market and community networks. This is why it is crucial to have qualitative research grounded in the region. Aizawl, the urban centre of Mizoram is an important context to explore these processes. While existing work has explored the predictors of divorce among women in Aizawl (Thadathil & Sriram, 2020; Zohmangaihi, 2023), the issue of how mothers adapt their daily lives following divorce is undertheorized, and less studied.

The present study aims to fill this void, by conducting a qualitative multiple case analysis of 50 divorced mothers in the city Aizawl. Divorce leads to a re-distribution of daily responsibilities of women and men. The sharing, partial sharing or assumption of responsibilities, which were once shared between partner and spouse, were now integrated in the mother. But the same shift also created opportunities for financial education, autonomy in decision-making and identity building.

The study seeks answers to three questions:

(1) How do divorced mothers in Aizawl categorise the reorganisation of economic, caregiving and household responsibilities in their families after the divorce?

(2) How does motherhood, social judgements and psychological adaptation influence their postdivorce identities and relationships?

(3) What supports and coping mechanisms can help to rebuild daily life after a marriage breakup?

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framing

Economic and psychological effects of divorce have been well documented in research (Sarmadi & Khodabakhshi-Koolaei, 2023; Smock et al., 2024), while qualitative scholarship has demonstrated that marital status is not sufficient to determine those effects. Divorce is part of life, biographies, relationships and institutions. The definition of lower income varies, depending on whether a mother is employed and has affordable child-care, supportive kin, regular maintenance payments, and secure housing and manageable health needs. The qualitative approach is therefore useful as it provides insight into how these resources and pressures are felt together.

One of the most current issues that have been studied in the field of divorced motherhood is the economic vulnerability (Ajaz & Tabassum, 2022; Dhanya & Karthikeyan, 2026). The death or reduction of

a partner's contribution may occur at the same time as an increase in costs, obligations for children and limited labor market participation. (Rabiee et al., 2026) explain that the lack of a co-parent may limit financial, caregiving, time flex, and emotional supports. What is also important, however, is that paid work does not necessarily solve the disadvantages. Even when childcare is feminised, mothers may face a childcare dilemma between the need for more labor force participation and the additional time pressures it generates (Bai et al., 2026; Dai et al., 2022). In this context, employment is particularly relevant to the present study as many respondents referred to it as an imperative and not a given measure of empowerment but something that was negotiated around children's schooling, illness and daily routine (Frimmel et al., 2024).

Redistribution of care following divorce is also highly gendered. Separation can end conjugal relationships but not the notion that mothers should be the major organisers of their children's daily lives (Luthra & Haux, 2022). This may lead to a phenomenon that could be described as role concentration: breadwinning, caregiving and household management and decision making are concentrated in one individual. This focus can lead to overload, but can also impact leadership in the home (Adekoya et al., 2026; Dagunduro et al., 2024). Mothers who used to rely on their husbands for financial or important household decisions might be empowered to have more control over income and family decisions. Past mothers who were financially and/or decision-makingly dependent on their husbands may gain control over income and family choices. Agency and burden thus are not antithetical; they can be a product of the same reorganisation.

There is also an aspect of identity and social membership. Where marriage is still a significant identifier of adult respectability, divorce can turn into a "social identity". In their study on divorced women in Kashmir, (Khan & Hamid, 2021) identified that along with other economic, cultural and psychological issues, there was also a stigma attached to the divorcees. Goffman's classic statement of stigma is helpful here because it brings attention to the fact that the social discrediting attribute can restructure interaction when discrimination is not necessarily explicit (Kusow, 2004). Expectation is important: A woman may stay away from a gathering because she expects to be asked questions or judged even if such questions and judgement may not actually happen. That difference is therefore analytically relevant between what is excluded by direct exclusion and what is perceived as being unwelcome.

According to the census 2011, the number of divorced people in India was 1.36 million, which accounts for only 0.24% of the total married population, while the separated people showed a presence of 0.61% (Jacob and Chattopadhyay 2016). Among the divorced and separated women are divorced more often than men. Mizoram's divorce rate is four times higher than Nagaland, which has the second-highest rate (0.88%), and more than five times that of Gujarat, which is the highest rate (0.63%) in mainland India. It is important to study how divorced mothers reconstruct everyday life of their economic hardship, motherhood, identity, and social relationship.

In Mizo society, a "nuthlawi" (divorcee) a lady who has been divorce from her husband or who is unmarried a single mother. The term carries negative connotation of divorce women and their status is

poor and stigmatised while widows (*hmeithai*) receive greater sympathy following the death of a spouse, but a social stigma and negative perception lie to divorced mothers and their children. A society perspective towards a divorce mother is not a positive they draw judgement base on about their character; clothing sense a stereotype mindset exists in Mizo society. Zohmangaihi, 2023).

Adjustment to psychology is also very different. Divorce can ease conflict or violence and result in ongoing memories, uncertainty and emotional fatigue. Research in a qualitative study conducted in South India by (Jojo & Sathiyaseelan, 2019) has revealed that stressful experiences linked with traumatic relationships can extend beyond the divorce proceedings. In the present cases there is anxiety, sadness, loneliness, loss of interest, feeling hopeless (AL-shahrani & Hammad, 2023; Hald et al., 2022), however, in a small number of stories there were thoughts of suicide. These experiences cannot be split into the legal action of divorce. They are linked to previous marital violence, lack of economic resources, health issues, parenting responsibilities, social relationships.

In this literature, the present study will adopt the concept of “everyday reconstruction”. It is a phrase used to describe the actual and symbolic labor involved in the reconstruction of a viable family after divorce.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design and study setting

A qualitative multiple-case study design was used in this study. The design of the study was multiple-case study of a qualitative approach to understanding how urban divorced mothers reconstruct the daily lives after the dissolution of their marriage. The geographical and analytical boundaries of the case were limited to Aizawl, the main urban centre of Mizoram, India and to women who are divorced mothers. A multiple case approach was warranted because the study was designed to both preserve the contextual integrity of individual life accounts and to provide the opportunity to detect patterns that emerged across women with varying ages, educational levels, occupations, number of children and length of divorce. The study didn't see divorce as a one-off event actually, but rather as a continuous reorganisation of economic life, caring, household leadership, motherhood, social identity and psychological feelings and support relationships.

3.2 Participants and analytic sample

The analytic sample consisted of 50 divorced mothers in urban areas of Aizawl. To be included in the present analysis, a case record was required to include the case subject as a divorced woman, to specify that the case subject was a mother, and to have an adequate amount of post-divorce narrative material to analyse changes in everyday life. The resulting sample consisted of a mix of socioeconomic and family situations. The ages of the participants ranged from 22 to 62 years ($M = 35.4$ years). The levels of educational attainment ranged from primary schools to post graduate education, while the jobs held by the respondents were: self-employed, government, teaching and other education, daily-wage workers, homemakers, unemployed and other salaried workers. The number of children ranged from one to four,

and the length of time participants had been divorced ranged from two to ten years at the time of the data collection. This variation enabled the cross-case analysis to look at common processes without making the assumption that divorce is the same experience for divorced urban women in general.

Table 1
Demographic and family profile of participants (N = 50)

Characteristic	Category	N	%
Age (years)	18–24	7	14.0
	25–34	18	36.0
	35–44	18	36.0
	45–54	4	8.0
	55+	3	6.0
Education	Higher Secondary	17	34.0
	Primary	15	30.0
	Graduate	12	24.0
	Postgraduate	6	12.0
Occupation	Self employed	14	28.0
	Daily wages labourer	8	16.0
	Unemployed	8	16.0
	Government employed	7	14.0
	Education professional	6	12.0
	Homemaker	5	10.0
	Other salaried	1	2.0
	Retired/pensioner	1	2.0
Number of children	1	14	28.0
	2	20	40.0
	3	11	22.0
	4	5	10.0
Time since divorce	2–3 years	20	40.0
	4–5 years	12	24.0
	6–7 years	13	26.0
	8 + years	5	10.0

3.3 Qualitative case material and data preparation

Fifty qualitative case records, including biographical information, marital and post-divorce contexts, accounts of reorganisation of the family and economy, and first-person participant quotations were studied. The records were approached as single units of information and not as a series of uncontextualized quotations. The material was organised before cross case coding in order to allow each participant's account to be read in its entirety, while focusing on conditions prior to divorce, the immediate post-divorce transition, ongoing responsibilities, and subsequent adaptation. Information that would identify was reduced in the analytic presentation and quotations were chosen to illuminate a theme, not just for their rhetorical power. If the source records were filled with locally-specific terms, like 'nuthlawi', the term was used and briefly explained as its in-local meaning was analytically relevant.

3.4 Analytic strategy

The qualitative data from the cases was organized/analysed using NVivo for systematic data management and thematic analysis. The NVivo-assisted analysis was carried out in five phases.

Step 1 – Case Classification

Participant case classification was first conducted by treating each of the 50 participants as a single case, and categorising the demographic and contextual attributes which were considered relevant, such as age, level of education, occupation, number of children and years since divorce. This maintained the contextual properties of each participant and allowed the data to be compared across the dataset.

Step 2 - Familiarisation

Second, familiarisation included multiple readings of the entire case narratives in order to gain a depth of understanding of participants' experiences of post-divorce life, such as economic responsibilities, motherhood, work, household reorganisation, social relationships, psychological adjustment, and family support. In this stage initial observations were noted; this may be patterns that were significant.

Step 3 - Initial/Open Coding

Third, initial/open coding was carried out by assigning descriptive codes to meaningful parts of the stories. Coding was maintained near to participants' interpretations, and included codes for financial strain, lack of child maintenance, conflict with employer, parenting duties, emotional upset, social stigmatization, social isolation, family support, and growing independence. If more than one aspect of post-divorce life was represented in an account, more than one code was included.

Step 4 - Code Consolidation

Fourth, code consolidation consisted of reading the evolving coding structure for all 50 cases and merging codes for experiences that were similar or close, yet maintaining differences that were meaningful between experiences. This resulted in a more consistent code structure and less duplication.

Step 5 - Category Development

Fifth, category development was the process of grouping the merged codes into higher-order categories of analysis that denoted common themes in the divorced women's post-divorce experiences in the city. The thematic structure from the findings was based on these categories, which were used to organise the themes as follows: economic hardship and burden of motherhood; gender roles and reorganisation of household responsibilities; motherhood and parenting after divorce; identity reconstruction, social judgements and feeling of unwelcomeness; psychological distress and emotional adjustment; and kinship support, coping and resilience.

The NVivo software was used for organising and managing the qualitative material, and interpretation of the categories and themes was subjective, and grounded in repeated engagement with the full case narratives.

3.5 Analytical rigour and reflexive safeguards

To enhance the analytical rigour, several procedures were adopted. First, the situation of comparisons was within-case reading before cross-case comparison, thus keeping quotations aligned with the contexts in which they were produced. Second, themes were only retained if they conveyed a meaningful pattern across cases or if they accounted for an analytically important variation; frequency alone wasn't considered as evidence of importance. Third, the tensions within themes were actively explored. Employment was viewed as a means of independence and as work-care strain; family support was viewed as protection and as a relationship between partners which women might not want to be bound to indefinitely. Fourth, interpretations differentiated between direct social exclusion and participants' sense of judgment or rejection from the community, thus minimizing the form of social rejection than the content of the accounts warranted. Lastly, findings are based on multiple cases and contrasting examples rather than a few unusually vivid stories.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Sensitive descriptions of domestic conflict and violence, serious health issues, psychological distress and suicidal ideation are included in the case material. As a result, these experiences are reported here with the important emphasis on confidentiality and minimisation of identifying detail. Where not already part of the anonymised case record, participants are identified by case number or generic descriptors. Quotes about mental health and violence are only used when they are necessary to establish the analytic finding. Participation was voluntary and the purpose of the study was explained to participants in local language. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant. Participants were also informed that they could refuse to participate or withdraw at any stage. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study. The study received approval from the Institutional Ethics Committee Amity University, Uttar Pradesh Ref No: AUUP/IEC/JULY/2025/17.

4. Findings

The cross-case analysis indicates that the adjustment of post-divorce life was not a single adjustment. Instead, they indicated the simultaneous changes in income, care, power, social identity and emotional

well-being. These multiple transitions are captured in six themes.

Table 2
Illustrative cross-case preview of post-divorce experiences

Case	Primary analytic focus	Illustrative experience	Analytic value
Case 1	Family and identity reorganization	Transition from wife-and-mother identity to primary caregiver; social withdrawal after perceived judgement.	Shows divorce as simultaneous household and social-identity transition.
Case 15	Economic pressure and education	Limited income; school expenditure prioritized over the mother's own expenses.	Illustrates child-centred financial sacrifice.
Case 16	Child maintenance and caregiving	Irregular paternal contribution; mother carries daily care, health and schooling expenses.	Shows concentration of financial and caregiving responsibility.
Case 21	Social judgements	Use of "nuthlawi" and anticipation of gossip contributed to avoidance of gatherings.	Distinguishes social judgements and perceived unwelcomeness from formal exclusion.
Case 22	Child emotional adjustment	Child anxiety and fear of abandonment; mother-maintained routines while managing her own adjustment.	Demonstrates interdependence of maternal and child adjustment.
Case 23	Employment-care conflict	Paid work was necessary, but employment generated worry about children and loss of income when care was needed.	Captures the autonomy-burden paradox of employment.
Case 31	Layered vulnerability	Pre-existing insecure work, weak savings and housing instability continued after divorce.	Shows that divorce can intensify vulnerabilities rather than create them from nothing.
Case 42	Identity reconstruction	Role overload and feeling "only a mother," followed by growing autonomy through work and decision-making.	Illustrates gradual reconstruction rather than a simple recovery narrative.
Case 43	Psychological distress	Persistent worry, isolation and difficulty functioning; professional help sought.	Shows psychological distress as intertwined with financial and social pressures.
Case 48	Severe emotional crisis	Overwhelming uncertainty and suicidal thoughts during the most difficult period.	Highlights the need for post-divorce mental-health support and careful safeguarding.

Table 3
Final thematic structure and interpretive propositions

Theme	Key subthemes	Interpretive proposition
Economic hardship and the burden of motherhood	Income; child maintenance; school/health costs; employment-care conflict	Economic vulnerability was produced by the interaction of limited resources, care obligations and irregular paternal contribution.
Gender roles and household reorganization	Primary caregiving; provider role; decision-making; unpaid care; role overload	Divorce frequently concentrated provider, caregiver and decision-making roles in mothers.
Motherhood and parenting after divorce	Children's emotional adjustment; education; routines; protection; co-parenting	Children became the organizing centre of post-divorce decisions and a source of both pressure and purpose.
Identity reconstruction and social judgements	Divorced identity; "nuthlawi"; intrusive questions; perceived judgement; withdrawal; confidence	Social difficulty often operated through anticipated judgement and self-protective withdrawal rather than direct exclusion alone.
Psychological distress and emotional adjustment	Anxiety; loneliness; exhaustion; trauma; severe distress; recovery	Emotional well-being was shaped by cumulative pressures before and after divorce, not marital dissolution in isolation.
Kinship support, coping and resilience	Parents/siblings; childcare; housing; work; professional support; autonomy	Resilience was relational and material: women rebuilt stability by mobilizing support while gradually expanding autonomy.

4.1 Economic hardship and the burden of motherhood after divorce

Economic pressure was one of the most consistent features of the cases but did not often just be described as a loss of income. The financial pressures created by the centralization of costs and responsibilities in the mother (food, rent, school fees, uniforms, transport, healthcare and unforeseen expenses) were also a cause of financial strain. One participant summarized the shift as it was becoming one's responsibility for "almost everything," such as food, school costs, clothing and health. Difficulty was further compounded because more paid work meant less time for children. The cost of education had a special moral burden. Mothers have repeatedly been seen to make sacrifices to prioritise school continuity over taking on extra work or borrowing from family members and even over sacrificing their own consumption. One participant said: "Since my divorce, I need to think about various things for my kids, some of the things that the kids have to do, it is hard to manage my own things to meet their needs sometimes." One of the other "others" mentioned the urgency of the school's demands: *"When the school was asking for fees, I had to get money somehow because my father had not paid."*

This was compounded by irregular child maintenance payments. Many participants spoke of fathers who provided limited irregular financial support and had failed to be involved in the day-to-day costs, leaving mother to shoulder and much of the children everyday expenses and caregiving responsibilities. One mother of two said: “The children live with me, they go to school with me, they fall ill with me and all the bills fall on me, but their father does not regularly send money for them.” One said, *“I have to get the money if the kids want something”*. What these accounts reveal is that financial vulnerability was ingrained within an unequal distribution of parental responsibility. Employment, then, could not be avoided and was ambivalent. Divorce encouraged some women to take up a job or work more. *“Well, I have kids, I have to make a living, I can’t decide not to work,”* said one of the participants. But the same child captured the work–care dilemma in a nutshell: *“When I am at work, I worry about my children. When I stay with my children, I worry about losing income.”* This was especially significant for women who were either self-employed or working in the informal economy and those who had less access to other forms of childcare.

Importantly, the cases also demonstrate that employment may be a source of autonomy. Those who had relied heavily on husbands talked about learning how to handle income and household expenditure. One woman described how after getting divorced *“all the financial decisions were mine.”* Later she had more control over the finances of the household because of regular employment. Economic independence, however, did not end up in lack of vulnerability; it took a different shape. The changes were from a reliance on a spouse to the responsibility of providing income and being the primary caregiver.

4.2 Gender roles and the reorganisation of household responsibilities

Divorce changed the balance of power in the family. Participants transitioned into their own roles as primary caregivers, household managers, providers, and decision makers, all at the same time. It was not just the number of things women did that changed; things that were spread out among a marital household came together in one adult. One participant said about the structural transformation of the family situation: *“Pre-divorce, we were a family of four; post-divorce, it was only me and the children—no husband in the home anymore—and I was the one responsible for the children and the home”*. Another focused on the increase in decision making, and said, *“When there used to be a problem with the kids, I would go to their father and he would decide, now I have to make all the decisions by myself.”* This reorganisation led to role overload.

A mother with three children said that childcare included preparing children for school, getting them to school, taking care of their health, doing household chores, and managing money. When the children need something, there is no one else to do it, she said. *“Should have to leave work, make arrangements, go home again”*. Another participant, who worked more hours, said she worked during the day, and then came home to take care of the children. At times, she felt bad that she couldn't go to school meetings or do homework. These experiences are examples of a gender continuity throughout marriage transition. The conjugal relationship was severed, but the idea of maternal responsibility continued to exist.

In some instances, fathers' involvement was restricted to providing occasional financial support or to participating in the conversation on the big decisions affecting children, while mothers took on the daily responsibility of child rearing. Therefore, divorce was more redistributive than care in the sense that the provider role was shifted more than the care role. Meanwhile, more responsibilities might create new competence. One participant noted: *"It was challenging at first but I found out I could deal with it on my own"*. Others reported learning how to make economic and home decisions without their husband's help. The results thus defy a simple dichotomy between burden and empowerment. More autonomy came as a consequence of the need to do more work.

4.3 Motherhood and parenting after divorce

For many, the focus of life after divorce shifted to becoming mothers. For many, the most important aspect of life after divorce was now reshaping around the need to be mother. Children were often used as a screen to make decisions related to employment, expenses, housing and social relations. *"If I made a decision now, then I would think of my kids first, and then I would think of myself"*. This child centred orientation gave continuity at a time of changing family structure. Children's emotional security was especially a worry among participants. One mother noted that when her child was separated, he or she began to become nervous and asked over and over again if she would go too. She explained how she had to reassure the child as well as how she had to be strong even though she was not sure herself: *"I had to be strong even when I didn't know what was happening, but I had to reassure the child as well."* Another mom said: *"Another mom was saying I was a strong person for my child and me at the time because we were dealing with the separation."* The cases also demonstrate that children's experience of conflict prior to divorce was often extensive.

Mothers in families with alcohol misuse and/or frequent conflict reported that children became quiet, withdrawn, anxious and/or overly attached to them. One participant said, *"My kids knew when their dad had been drinking, even before he got home, they would get really quiet saying there might be a fight"*. After separation, some mothers actively tried to establish more peaceful patterns, shield their children from adult problems and protect their children from change in school and home. The experience of loss was not shared by all parents after divorce. Some women said that they felt closer to their children as they were involved in all aspects of daily activities.

One participant commented, *"I got more involved in all areas of my child's life after the divorce."* The mother-child bond may thus be more challenging and more significant for the family identity. Co-parenting, when it was present, was still not well-functioning. Others were still involved, but there were conflicts about schooling, health and decisions. One participant stated, *"We can talk about the kids, but sometimes it's not the same thing."* Others reported asking for financial aid for school expenses repeatedly until the negotiating became tedious. Results indicate that, while the involvement versus absence dichotomy is not appropriate in post-divorce parenting, it is important to consider the quality, frequency and feasibility of involvement.

4.4 Identity reconstruction, social judgements and feelings of unwelcomeness

Divorce not only affected the nature of participants' households, it also impacted participants' sense of social identity. Wives and mothers were the primary roles of several women who had already known themselves in these roles. They were required to re-imagine themselves and their view of self and their view of others when the role of husband or wife was eliminated. In one case, a very deep sense of "loss of self" was described, where the participant felt she had become "only a mother." With time, she realised herself as a woman again, through work, happy relationships and making her own choices. Social problems were frequently vague. However, the participants were not always about direct exclusion from community life. They were more frequently, intrusive questions, gossip, sometimes a feeling of being known as divorced, and indirect comments.

One woman described: *"Not necessarily that they're saying anything outright, but you feel that they're looking at you differently as a divorcee"*. This assumed stare might create an emotional cost to normal social participation. In one instance the local designation "nuthlawi" was particularly important. The participant said: *"People say to me nuthlawi (divorcee woman) and people are talking about me; I would rather do things myself"*. She most certainly did not attend social activities where it would have been mentioned. Her withdrawal was not necessarily a sign of bad social encounters, but rather a defensive mechanism in response to the fear of being judged and embarrassed. Other similar patterns were seen in other locations. I felt that after my divorce, I didn't want to be the subject of people's questions about my marriage or the conversation about my personal life, said a participant. It was easier for me to stay at home. Another said that she had ceased to meet people because she didn't want to be questioned and was feeling people were gossiping about her.

These stories illustrate how a sense of "unwelcomeness" may have a social impact even when it is not explicitly institutionalized. However, there were signs of identity reconstruction too. Women reported a gradual resumption of social activities, rebuilding relationships, and building confidence in making decisions about themselves, etc. One participant commented: *"Earlier many decisions were taken with the husband, but now I have learned to make decisions myself."* Post-divorce identity was not, then, a fixed and unchangeable stigmatised identity, nor was it a straightforward narrative of liberation. It was negotiated in a number of interactions between social judgements, motherhood, work, kinship and personal agency.

4.5 Psychological distress and emotional adjustment

The level of psychological distress varied from feelings of uncertainty and loneliness to extreme trauma. Some women said that the first months or years after divorce were very confusing. One participant expressed that the initial few months were challenging as they were unsure of their future. Yet another mentioned a feeling of sadness that did not go away and trouble focusing: *"I felt sad for a long time and unable to focus on anything—on why my marriage failed and what my life would be like without it."* Others

participants were related to distress that occurred before the divorce. Separation didn't take away the fear or trauma in narratives of domestic violence, of alcohol abuse, of infidelity, or of chronic disagreement.

One participant who had grown up in a home where there was conflict responded: *"I was always on my guard, never knew when another argument was going to start, even when it was quiet."* Post separation conflict diminished but the fear of the unknown persisted. Loneliness was also identified, even among those living with children. There was no one to share routine decisions, worries, or practical problems with so there was no partner. This was therefore not physical, but relational loneliness. It could escalate if they withdrew from society, especially if women were not allowed to attend gatherings due to fear of judgement. A minority of cases had significant mental-health issues.

One participant expressed a desire to seek professional help and was diagnosed with mental health issues. *"My life after divorce wasn't the same, I was always worried, couldn't focus, was emotionally drained, when I was diagnosed, I knew that it was a true mental-health issue and I needed assistance."* One participant reported times when *"even simple things felt difficult"* when she didn't have "emotional energy." The data also contain disclosures of suicidal thoughts.

One woman said she had instances when everything was too heavy and she didn't want to go on. The same extreme sense of hopelessness in the face of marital failure was also reported in previous case stories. These case reports highlight the importance of mental health not being only a side effect of divorce.

Together with financial insecurity, parenting, social judgment, health issues and recollections of marital conflict, distress was entangled.

4.6 Kinship support, coping and resilience

One of the most significant resources in the cases was the support of parents, extended family and siblings. Kin gave care, shelter, money and emotional support to children. Occasional assistance from parents and siblings enabled mothers whose jobs meant they had to be away from their children to work. One of the participants who had difficulty finding work and with childcare said that family members helped them, but she would not want them to help her all the time. More specifically, kinship support was significant during the housing instabilities.

One participant had to switch between homes of her relatives after divorce before she was able to get temporary housing. Another (who was in health and economic hardship) relocated to an uncle's home with her child, and said that extended family was giving her stability and safety. This support served as a buffer to any immediate crisis, although women still worried about dependency in the long-term. Coping also meant developing a routine. Mothers ensured school attendance was stable, structured family time and created strategies to manage working and caring responsibilities. These seemingly mundane activities played a crucial role in reconstruction, as they brought back the regularity in the world of mother and child. Repeated problem solving over time led to confidence. The other resource was

employment, but not just for the income it brought. Women who had more regular employment reported better financial control and self-confidence.

In times of high stress, it was crucial to have access to professional mental health assistance. Other women were able to re-establish an emotional balance with trusted family relationships. The information thus indicates that resilience was relational and material, rather than simply an individual personality trait.

5. Discussion

The present study focused on the reconstruction of everyday life by urban divorced mothers of Aizawl. A general conclusion that emerges from the findings is that divorce is not simply the end of a marriage but a reorganization of resources, responsibilities, identities and relationships. In all of the cases, there was a tendency for economic provision, caregiving, and household management and decision-making to fall into the hands of mothers. The discussion is therefore set in context with the previous studies and what the present study brings in addition to the previous studies on the issue of post-divorce life in the Aizawl area.

One of the most noticeable similarities with previous Indian studies was economic hardship. In a phenomenological study of divorced women, (Khan & Hamid, 2021) identified four challenges as social, economic, cultural and psychological. In more recent times, (Ottakkam Thodukayil et al., 2026) also found that economic hardship, psychological distress, child-related issues, legal problems, and stigma from society were common post-divorce issues for women in India in their systematic review of the research. The Aizawl cases demonstrate the significance of economic insecurity, and also begin to expand the literature by suggesting that economic vulnerability cannot be analytically detached from care. The nature and extent of mothers' work was determined by the school fees, could cover health costs, irregular maintenance, and children's daily expenses. Economic hardship was thus not just a lack of income, but a constant negotiation of income and care.

This interdependence is refined here, by means of the concept of role concentration. Being a divorcee was not just a different way of providing for her family, it also meant that her role as a mother had changed. In many situations the economic provision, practical care and emotional care and household organisation and decision authority were increasingly concentrated in the same person. This would help to explain why employment was both described as a source of autonomy and a source of strain. The current study builds on (Moles & Bernardi, 2026; Recksiedler et al., 2023) dynamic understanding of vulnerability that extends to employment, housing, health and caregiving but focuses specifically on the clustering of multiple everyday family functions among divorced mothers. Role concentration can thus be used to account for the fact that despite apparent economic independence, time poverty, worry and ongoing vulnerability can persist.

The results for the social identity also support and extend previous research. Stigma is an important aspect of the post-divorce experience of divorced women as mentioned by (Qamar & Faizan, 2021) also

find stigma as part of the divorced women's experience in the context of Indian scholarship.

Reconstruction of identities was also integrated within material and relational practices. (van Schalkwyk, 2005) explain that post-divorce identity reconstruction is a process in which trauma can be reimagined and agency recovered. The Aizawl cases do share this focus on agency, however, but they indicate that reconstruction was sometimes being carried out via normal duties and without a distinct transformation. Income earning, household decision making, care taking children, taking or negotiating kin support, and the process of becoming part of the social world again, all resulted in a new self. In such situations the agency was functional and based on relationships. It was important that it did not take away susceptibility.

Altogether, the results highlight that reconstruction involves four processes: redistribution of income and care and authority; stabilisation of schooling, housing, routines, and children's emotional security; negotiation with former spouse, kin, work, and socially visible identities of divorce; and reconstruction of autonomy and self. These processes are not distinct, but rather overlap each other.

6. Practical Implications

The results suggest support needs that are connected to the inter-relatedness of post-divorce life. Emotional support should be offered alongside practical support where anxiety, trauma, loneliness or severe distress is ongoing where counselling and psychosocial services are made accessible. Accurate information on child maintenance, the legal system, employment and livelihood prospects, and accessible and affordable childcare can alleviate pressures arising from the focus of earning and caring for children on divorced mothers.

Family and kinship networks are still important sources of care for children, shelter and emotional support, but women shouldn't be reliant on informal sources alone. Peer-support opportunities could create space in which divorced mothers can discuss their experiences without judgment, and services for children could help them adjust to the changes in their family. There should also be a community response for gossip, intrusive judgment and assumptions about a divorced woman's dress or personality. The purpose is not to represent a society that is universally rejecting divorced mothers, but to promote regular relationships that increase their confidence, sense of belonging to, and social reintegration in, society.

7. Limitations and Future Research

The study has a number of limitations. First of all, it is located in just one urban area and cannot be regarded as a representative sample of divorced mothers throughout Mizoram or India. It isn't a statistical generalisation, but is analytic and contextual. Second, the findings reported here are from the mothers' experience, and the study does not include the perspectives of children, former husbands, relatives or services providers. Third, the cross-sectional nature of the case material means that it does not follow the same women over time, but rather contains retrospective accounts at various points since

divorce. This limits the ability to determine how particular forms of vulnerability or resilience change over time. Fourth, the sample is diverse in terms of age, education, occupation and number of children and years since divorce. This diversity helps to build an understanding of the cross case but also makes it important to recognize that the 6 themes are not necessarily equally important for each participant.

Further research might focus on socioeconomic difference, age of children, and the employment security and years since divorce. A longitudinal study would be especially interesting as the cases indicate that post-divorce adjustment is not necessarily a linear process. Longer-term research into mothers' lives could provide data on the extent to which employment, housing, health, re-partnering and child maintenance experience over several years modify vulnerability. A comparative study between urban and rural Mizoram, and across the cultural groups or within the Indian states could help shed light on the processes that are common to all and which are unique to particular localities. Research that takes children's voices and perspectives and research on coparenting would also help to advance understanding of families after divorce.

8. Conclusion

Based on this study, it is concluded that the divorce of urban moms in Aizawl is not understood properly as just divorce. It restructures everyday family life, by focusing on the organization of economic provision, care, household management and decision-making, while mothers at the same time are negotiating children's needs, work, relations with past spouse, family member support, psychological distress and shifting social identity. The results bring this process into conceptualization in role concentration and in everyday reconstruction, and consider agency and vulnerability not necessarily as a process of hardship to recovery but rather as a process of coexistence.

This reconstruction is special in that regard, especially for the social environment. While most participants did not describe society as all-embracing, judgement, gossip, negative assumptions and feeling unwelcome may heighten women's emotional distress after they have faced significant marital and post-marital difficulties. Negative attitudes of the society towards divorced mothers therefore need to be addressed not only due to the fact that their exclusion is detrimental, but also because their daily treatment can affect their confidence, sense of belonging and willingness to engage in social life. Support for self-confidence and social reintegration can be achieved through more respectful and non-judgemental social responses.

The relationship between material and emotional needs should then be taken into account in post-divorce support. Stable daily life for divorced mothers can be fostered by economic and employment security, family counselling, child maintenance information and support, childcare assistance and supportive relationships with family and peers. Community responses need to be flexible, however, in defining the woman primarily by her marital status. More generally, that successful adjustment to divorce requires not just women's coping strategies, but the economic, family, and social context in which adjustment occurs.

Declarations

Competing interests:

The authors declare no competing interests.

Conflict of interest:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Author Contribution

Irene C. Lalrindiki conceived the study, collected the data, and prepare the manuscript draft. Chandrakala Diyali contributed to the conceptualization of the study and provided guidance all stages of the research. Dr Nemthianngai Guite provided guidance on the study.

Data Availability

All data supporting the findings of this study are included within the paper

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