



Psychological Condition of Women Who Divorced Due to Husbands' Infidelity

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Abstract

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The divorce experience of a woman caused by her husband's infidelity will impact her life. This study aimed to understand the psychological impacts of divorced women due to their husbands' infidelity. The research used a phenomenological method of qualitative approach. Research participants were five women who experienced a divorce caused by husbands' infidelity selected using the purposive sampling technique. The age range of the participants was 26 to 38 years. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. The data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The results of this study showed that the psychological condition of women who divorced because of infidelity included feelings of inferiority and worthless, fear and worry about the future, feelings of sadness and misery, regret and disappointment because the reality was different from expectations, anger, hate and heartache, hopeless, difficulty trusting men because of feeling betrayed. During the infidelity, the husband and wife relationship experienced conflict, which worsened the situation until they decided to divorce. Even after the divorce, the negative psychological conditions were still felt and caused doubts about the self's ability to be responsible for growing up children and making them happy.

INTRODUCTION

Every couple craves a harmonious and happy married life, but to make it happen is not easy. Marriage is the process of uniting two individuals with different backgrounds and characters in a legitimate bond so that a potential conflict may happen between couples. The conflicts that occur in married life are not a thing that can be avoided. The ability of each couple to solve their household problems will affect the sustainability and happiness of their marriage. However, not a few couples resolve the conflicts in their married life by choosing divorce as a settlement. Based on records made by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia at the end of 2021, the divorce rate in Indonesia, reported from the CNN Indonesia page, Director General of Islamic Community Guidance, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Kamaruddin Amin, says that based on the record until December 2021, on average, every year, there were 300 thousand

divorce rates in Indonesia. At least 300 thousand women became widows, and men became widowers because of divorce every year (CNN Indonesia, 2021). The condition indicates that there are still many marital bonds that end in divorce.

Divorce can be caused by a variety of factors behind it. In Indonesia, the high divorce rate is caused by various problems among married couples that cannot be resolved properly so that it ends in divorce. Kamaruddin explains various factors that make the divorce rate in Indonesia very high such as the economy and the loyalty of married couples or infidelity (CNN Indonesia, 2021).

The problem of infidelity is not new in married life. Denmark et al. (2016) state that men intend to have a greater affair and are more recorded to have affairs than women. Williams and Knudson (2013) say that the high intention of men to have an affair is caused because men are considered to have greater power in relationships, thus increasing the tendency to have infidelity. Besides, a lack of self-control and a high desire to connect with others who are not their partners can cause the men to have an affair. When a man has an affair, then the woman becomes the victim.

Various studies on the analysis of the impact of divorce have been done a lot. Women who suffer psychologically due to divorce need time to recover their condition. According to Olson et al. (2011), the psychological impact of divorce for couples can last quite a long time, from months to several years after the divorce process.

Divorce due to infidelity has a different psychological impact than other causes, especially for the victim. According to Ginanjar (2013), individuals who do cheating against marital loyalty can cause their partners to feel heartache. Synder et al. (2008) explain that the condition can cause stress reactions in individuals who are cheated on. This is in line with what Dusturia and Suprapti (2017) state that victims of infidelity are more susceptible to psychological disorders and negative emotions that ultimately lead to negative behavior. According to Irawan and Suprapti (2018), women who divorce due to their husband's infidelity experience changes in physical and psychological conditions in the individual and parenting patterns given to children after becoming single parents. They explain that a person who has experienced divorce due to infidelity loses confidence and trust in others, especially towards a partner, loses happiness, becomes depressed, and can trigger acts of aggression to criminal acts such as murder.

Nevertheless, Kim and McKenry (2002) say that divorced women have better psychological conditions than women who maintain unhappy marriages. Research conducted by Savitri (2017) also explains that women who are victims of husbands' infidelity can achieve positive psychological conditions. She says that when an individual can give more positive evaluations of various experiences and conditions in her life and take wisdom from every event even though it is not the ideal condition expected, the individual can feel well being. This is in line with the research of Steven and Sukmaningrum (2020), which states that forgiveness and acceptance of negative

conditions with a positive point of view can help women who become victims of resilient infidelity in their married life.

Many studies have examined the psychological condition of divorced women, including the study of Muardini et al. (2019), which focuses on the impact of divorce on young women who decide to end their marriage. The study found that the most impacts felt by young women when going through divorce were financial hardship and negative stigma in society as widows. Rahmalia & Sary (2018) also conducted research about the psychological dynamics of divorced women that focused on the impact of divorce that occurs, but the divorce experienced was not because of infidelity. Research (Putri dan Aulia, 2021; Steven and Sukmaningrum, 2020; Savitri, 2017; Sari (2012); Sa'adah (2018) has studied women who still maintained marriage despite their husband's affair by forgiving, staying sincere, and exerting their resilience abilities.

Unlike previous studies, this study focused on women who chose to divorce because their husbands were having an affair. This study sought to obtain a description of the psychological condition of women who divorced because of their husbands' infidelity. Understanding this psychological condition is important so that in the future, a program can be prepared to provide assistance to prevent psychological conditions that worsen after divorce. Women with experiences of divorce due to their husbands' infidelity have different fantasies and meanings between individuals and others. According to (Tov & Diener, 2013), this can be due to differences in the way individuals interpret their self-condition and experiences that occur in their lives. An individual's ability to deal with and resolve post-divorce problems can help her to be more positive in living her new life (Sasongko et al., 2013). Therefore, this study was conducted to gain an understanding of "What are the psychological conditions of women who divorce due to husbands' infidelity?"

METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach, especially phenomenological research. The selection of this method was in line with the purpose of research to uncover life experiences that impact a person's psychological condition. The phenomenological research was chosen because researchers sought to identify the essence of the experience of women who divorced due to husbands' infidelity. According to Creswel (2012), phenomenology is a research strategy in which researchers identify the nature of the human experience of a particular phenomenon. Through this phenomenological approach, researchers sought to understand the meaning of various events in a particular setting from the participants' points of view. Phenomenology emphasizes various subjective aspects of human behavior. In this study, researchers sought to understand how divorced women dealt with events that occurred in their household lives, especially those related to relationships with husbands. Of course, experiences in dealing with the events

of divorce were understood and then given meaning by women who lived it. The essence of such experience is the focus of this research.

The participants were chosen using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a technique in non-probability sampling based on the characteristics possessed by the selected subject because these characteristics are in accordance with the purpose of the research to be carried out (Herdiansyah, 2015). According to Sugiono (2016), purposive sampling is a technique for selecting research informants with a certain consideration or criteria. The number of participants in this study was 5 people. A small sample size carries great responsibility for researchers in conducting in-depth interviews to dig up information about participants' experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

The steps of getting participants include: (1) Looking for information related to prospective participants who meet the requirements as research participants; (2) Contacting personally prospective participants to inform them about the research to be carried out; (3) Meeting with prospective participants for an interview and asking about willingness to participate in the study. The following demographic data of the participants of this study was described in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Participants

Initials Name	Age (Year)	Length of Marriage	Divorce Time Span	Number of children	Ethnic Groups	Religion	Last Education/ Occupation
R	30	11 years	3 years	1	Javanese	Christian	D3/Private Employees
W	38	12 years	2 years	2	Javanese	Islam	S1/PNS (Civil Servants)
N	28	6 years	12 years	3	Dayaknese	Islam	S1/PNS
H	34	8 years	3 years	2	Banjarese	Islam	SMA / Honorary staff of Local Government
P	26	2 years	6 months	1	Banjarese	Islam	SMA/Private Employees

Research instruments used semi-structured interviews to obtain in-depth participant experience data. In the implementation of the interview, researchers used interview guidelines that contained main questions in the form of open questions. Observations made included verbal aspects such as tone of speech or intonation, word stress, language use, and non-verbal aspects including expression, facial expressions, attitudes, and behaviors during the interview. The interview process was recorded with a digital recording device with the participants' consent. Researchers also made field records during the data collection process.

The interview process was carried out directly at the place agreed by the participants. Four participants requested a private room provided by the researchers in a special room in the researcher's house. Participants felt that their homes were less

conducive to the conduct of interviews. Meanwhile, one participant was willing to be interviewed at her home because it was considered quite conducive. Interview data collection was carried out in as many as one to two meetings, with 90 to 120 minutes.

The data analysis used in this study is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). According to La Kahija (2017), IPA rests on three pillars, namely phenomenology (phenomenological philosophy), hermeneutics (theory of interpretation), and idiography (the study of humans in their uniqueness). In this study, researchers tried to implement the three pillars of IPA, namely: (1) Phenomenology based on epoche; (2) Interpretations by understanding each participant's words without removing them from the transcript; (3) Idiography based on the uniqueness of each participant.

The steps taken by researchers in conducting IPA analysis were: (1) Reading many times the transcript of the interview results with participants so that the researchers were familiar with the transcript; (2) Making initial noting. Researchers commented on the meaning of the transcript, and the comments made by this researcher were exploratory comments; (3) Creating emergent themes. These themes were created by the researchers as a form of conclusion from previous comments; (4) Researchers grouped emergent themes in a larger theme, namely superordinate themes. Furthermore, researchers structured all superordinate themes based on the same patterns and referred to them as the main theme. Themes that appeared only in one of the participants were incorporated into a special theme.

In this study, researchers became the main tool in data collection and data analysis. The experience of researchers working in the field of human resources who often handle employee divorce cases and cultural experiences as individuals born and raised on the island of Kalimantan can affect the way researchers view the participants' life experiences. The interpretation developed by the researchers may refer to their experiences of themselves and the experiences of others who have been discovered by the researchers. This condition allowed researchers to voice the meaning of important events told by participants by interpreting the information conveyed by participants.

RESULTS

The results showed the psychological impact of divorce on women as victims of their husbands' infidelity. The findings in the five participants showed changes in psychological conditions as a result of the divorce experience caused by their husbands' infidelity. Psychological conditions found in the participants of this study include feelings of inferiority and worthlessness, fear and worry, feelings of sadness and misery, regret and disappointment, anger, hatred and heartache, despair and feelings of loss, and difficulty trusting men.

Feelings of inferiority and worthlessness

The psychological condition found in the five participants in the study was a feeling of inferiority and worthlessness as a result of divorce due to their husbands' infidelity. Feelings of inferiority and worthlessness were revealed from the five participants who viewed their shortcomings as the cause of their husbands' infidelity. Participants also rated themselves no better than other women cheating on their husbands so that husbands preferred other women rather than maintaining the marriage. This condition also continued to judge them unfit to accompany a better man because of their status as widows, as happened to participants N and P.

Fear and worry

Another change in psychological condition felt by the five participants of this study was the fear and worry of living life after the divorce from their husbands. The worry found in this study was related to concerns about themselves and their children in living the next life. Self-worry arose in doubt, such as whether they can carry out their responsibilities to raise and make their children happy. Meanwhile, participants also felt worried that their children were getting negative treatment from their friends, such as experiencing bullying because they did not have a father.

Feelings of sadness and misery

Another change in psychological condition obtained from this study as an impact for women who divorced because of their husbands' infidelity was feeling sad and down. This condition was found in all four participants except participant P. Feelings of misery and sadness were found clearly in participants R, W, N, and H. This change in psychological condition was found in the participants' verbal expressions and non-verbal expressions that could be observed directly during the interview process, including from the participants' teary eyes and even shedding tears when remembering and recounting the bitter experiences of their lives.

Regret and disappointment

The psychological impact found in four participants except participant W was regret and disappointment. Feelings of regret and disappointment were found in participants R, N, H, and P as a form of psychological change due to divorce and infidelity carried out by their husbands. Participants felt disappointed because of the sacrifices made so far, just ignored by the husband. The long journey in the household that has been lived seems to be meaningless anymore. Divorce that occurs is feared to present inner wounds in the participants' children.

Anger, hate, and heartache

Negative emotions such as anger, hatred, and heartache over their husband's betrayal were experienced by three participants, namely N, H, and P. Negative emotions that appeared when N told and remembered her husband's betrayal were not only verbally shown but also found by researchers through observation of participants during the

interview process. The elevated tone of voice and gestures of the clenched fist was the result of observations.

Despair and feelings of loss

The results of this study also found the psychological impact of divorce due to a husband's infidelity in the form of feelings of loss that was only experienced by two participants, namely participants R and W. Both felt the loss of their soul mates because they had to live separately with their husbands due to divorce. According to Lestari (2012), the family is a source of affection, protection, and identity for its members. When divorce occurs, the function of the integrity of a family will change. They must lose their life partners, the source of affection, attention, and change in self-status after experiencing divorce. So, the participants of this study felt a feeling of loss due to their divorce experiences.

Difficulty trusting men

Women who are divorced due to their husbands' betrayal will affect their relationships and trust in men. This is one of the findings of psychological impact found in this study. Some participants showed a difficult feeling of returning to trusting men after experiencing internal injuries due to loyalty betrayal and divorce. This condition was found in three participants, namely participants R, N, and P, who found it difficult and could not fully trust men.

DISCUSSION

The feelings of inferiority and worthlessness experienced by participants began from self-abuse because their husbands preferred other women to their wives. Participants also felt that they had various shortcomings compared to the females cheating on their husbands. Participants felt that their appearance was less attractive to their husbands and considered it natural for their husbands to cheat. Psychologically, participants considered themselves worthless, both in the eyes of their husbands and others, because of their status as a widow, which is often viewed negatively. The findings of this study are in line with the results of the study of Muardini et al. (2019) that divorced women felt inferior and ashamed due to being widowed because their partners abandoned them.

Husband infidelity is a condition experienced by participants, which is interpreted as the husband's action to find a woman who is considered better than his wife. The participants also interpreted their condition negatively because her husband preferred other women to her who had many shortcomings. Feelings of inferiority and worthlessness are a sign of a crisis of confidence in participants. According to Zare (2011), divorce due to infidelity not only has an impact on the breakdown of trust in the cheating spouse but also deprives the individual's confidence as a victim of marital loyalty betrayal.

Coopersmith (1967) describes self-esteem as an evaluation of the individual and how the individual perceives himself and leads to acceptance or rejection and the individual's confidence in the abilities he has and the success he has achieved. He also says that self-esteem can be explained through the concepts of success, values, aspirations, and mechanisms of self-defense. Such success can arise through experience in the environment, success in a particular field, competition, and the value of truth. Divorce due to husband infidelity experienced by participants is a form of failure to achieve marital life success that triggers the emergence of feelings of inferiority and worthlessness. The experience of post-divorce life with the status of a widow also led participants to give a negative evaluation of themselves due to social experiences in a society that tend to be negative towards women with widow status. So, feelings of inferiority and worthlessness become an impact that arises and is felt by participants as a form of evaluation of the abuse of self-condition and the experience of widow status assessment that is common in their social environment.

The impact of fear and worry often occurs when a person faces a new situation that has never been experienced before. Divorce is a big transition in a person's life because of the loss of family integrity. According to Hasanah (2020), concerns felt by a single parent often occur because she has to take responsibility for herself raising and educating her children. After deciding to divorce, the mother becomes a single parent to her children and must perform duties and roles as a father alone due to loss or separation from her partner. This condition causes concerns in the process of carrying out roles and continuing life after divorce.

Failure to build a household and the loss of a life partner due to infidelity that leads to divorce provide inner wounds for a woman. According to Lusterman (2005), the psychological impact felt by women as victims of infidelity is influenced by the reaction of distress, which appears in various forms of thoughts and emotions, and negative thoughts cause negative feelings in participants. Research conducted by Irawan and Suprpti (2018) also explains that negative feelings such as sadness are an intense change in psychological conditions felt by women who divorce due to husbands' infidelity.

According to Kleinman and Good (1985), sadness is a reflection of something bad or related to other forms of grief and, in many cultures, is viewed as something negative, depending on how inspiration, nurture, and purpose are gained between oneself and others. This allows participants to reflect on the bad experience of divorce due to their husband's infidelity and feel deep sadness, especially when recalling the bitter events of their lives. The imbalance between the achievements obtained and the ideal conditions of other people's married lives also triggers a sense of decline in themselves due to compensating for their failed lives with the success of others. So that participants intensely feel negative feelings and judgments such as feeling betrayed by their husband, feeling that their life is unlucky and full of failures that eventually strengthen the feeling of sadness and misery that still persists in the participants.

The feelings of distress and sadness experienced by participants took relative time for recovery, and it depended on the individual's ability. According to Olson et al. (2011), recovery from post-divorce psychological conditions for divorced couples can take months to several years. They say that there is no definite time span for the recovery of psychological wounds due to divorce. Therefore, although these four participants had differences in post-divorce time spans, the sadness of the divorce experienced was still felt.

Generally, couples who build a household expect a lasting and happy marriage. When the hope is not fulfilled, it presents regret and disappointment. Nur'aeni & Dwiyantri (2016) reveal that there is hope and a view of married life as a good time before divorce. However, when tension is present in marriage and begins to harm marriage, life is seen as a deep bitterness and full of suffering. The reality of participants' failure in building a harmonious and happy household causes feelings of `disappointment towards themselves and their life partners. This is what can cause a person who fails to maintain her household to feel disappointed and regretful for her condition. According to Rahmalia & Sary (2018), the feeling of disappointment and regret of a woman who divorces due to her husband's infidelity occurs because of regret in choosing a partner and disappointment with the concept of marriage that does not correspond to reality. There is a mismatch between the hope of having a happy married life with the reality of the husband's infidelity and the divorce experienced, which causes disappointment and regret felt by participants.

The findings of the three participants of N, H, and P, showed that when they remember and recount unpleasant and painful experiences, it can arouse negative emotions. These negative feelings arise when participants recall the affair that their husbands committed to destroying their households. This condition is in line with the research of Adam (2020), which explains that when a person remembers negative events in her life, such as her husband's betrayal, the individual reacts verbally and non-verbally like anger.

The findings of psychological impact on women who divorce due to a husband's infidelity in the form of anger, hate, and heartache are caused because a wife attaches great importance to loyalty in the marital relationship, whatever form of infidelity carried out by the husband, the negative impact on marriage is very large and lasts long-term. Subotnik and Harris (2005) reveal that a husband's infidelity means betrayal of marital loyalty with the presence of another woman in marriage to cause tremendous feelings of heartache and anger because they are so devastated by the event. According to Satiadarma (2001), the affair experienced by the wife causes hurt and heartache due to injuries to the unity of interpersonal relationships that are believed to be a security in life. So, it is natural that the deep wounds depicted through emotions of anger, hatred, and heartache are still felt by participants, not only when the affair is revealed but also rising again when telling about her husband's betrayal.

The anger felt by participants is a series of emotions that arise related to hatred and heartache when they know betrayal was committed by their husbands. According to Synder et al. (2008), a very deep heartache makes the wife who is cheated on by her husband become a person filled with anger and hatred. This is due to the actions of the husband, who has violated the main principles of marriage. Glass and Staeheli (2003) explain that when the wife finds out that the trust given is fully perverted by the husband, then she turns very suspicious. Various ways are done to find evidence related to the affair. The openness of the details of the affair makes the wife angrier and more hurt, and no longer trusts her husband.

The study findings in the form of feelings of loss shown in participants R and W were closely related to the relatively long marriage age compared to the other three participants. The two participants had a long life together, so the divorce due to the husband's infidelity caused major changes in their lives. Losing a partner is a sudden life change that requires a person to adjust to her new state of life (Sari et al., 2019). This feeling of loss arises because of the patterns and habits of a life lived while together. Participants not only lost their status as wives but also felt changes in function in the family. Divorce makes the family lose the figure of the husband and father who has been guiding and paying attention.

Feelings of hopelessness and loss of life expectancy often occur when experiencing bad events in life. This condition is also a finding in two participants of this study. The findings in participant R showed a feeling of hopelessness after experiencing various bitter life events. Despair in participant R was found in suicide attempts that had been done so that she needed medical help. Not much different from participant R, participant N also felt hopeless due to her failure to maintain her household, but it was only the intention to end her life.

These findings explain the impact of despair felt by the participants of this study as a change in psychological conditions due to very heavy life pressures. According to Irawan and Suprpti (2018), women who divorce due to their husbands' infidelity experience changes in physical and psychological conditions in the individual. They explain that a person who has experienced divorce due to infidelity becomes depressed and feels a loss of happiness. It can trigger acts of aggression. Suicidal desires and attempts conducted by participants of this study showed an inability to deal with life pressures due to experiencing divorce and infidelity of their husbands. This feeling of hopelessness is a negative emotion that leads participants to perform negative behavior in the form of suicide attempts.

The experience of divorce due to infidelity is a painful event for participants. Husbands who prefer other women to their legal wives provide deep wounds to participants. This condition can cause feelings of a deterrent, and it is difficult to build trust in a partner due to betrayal of loyalty. The difficult feeling of regaining trust in men found in the three participants of this study indicated the trauma due to a betrayal of trust

committed by their husbands. Ismiati (2018) explains that the impact of a married couple's separation due to divorce has a greater traumatic effect than separation or divorce due to the death of a spouse. Couples who experience divorce life begin with disputes and hostility. Most couples who initially want to separate well dislike each other due to the divorce. The impact experienced by the three participants showed that the traumatic effects of infidelity and failure to build a household became bad memories that could inhibit participants from remarrying with others because of the difficult feeling of trusting men again.

Participants' ability to make adjustments plays an important role in the process of living a post-divorce life. Muhammad et al. (2019) explain that the response to the state of family crisis and the form of adaptation of a person after experiencing divorce is an important thing that helps the process of life after divorce. They say that the successful adjustment of divorced women shows the ability to overcome problems that focus on the formation of positive emotions and the existence of openness to new experiences. Thus, if participants can make a good adjustment process and try to accept negative experiences with positive meanings that can eventually improve positive emotions, it will provide opportunities for participants to have openness and rebuild trust in men.

Based on the findings of this study, the experience of women who divorced due to their husband's infidelity has an impact on their psychological condition. Husband's infidelity was considered a natural thing because of negative self-judgment, especially when comparing themselves to the husband's cheating partner. Negative emotions such as anger, disappointment, sadness, hate, and worry arose during times of conflict due to infidelity until post-divorce. A husband's affair was interpreted by participants as a form of betrayal of the trust given so as to make it difficult for participants to believe in men anymore.

CONCLUSION

Women who divorced due to their husbands' infidelity conducted a negative evaluation of themselves and their lives. The negative evaluation raised negative emotions such as feeling inferior, worthless, sad, down, disappointed, angry, hate, hurt, hopeless, worried, and lost. The infidelity committed by the husband was interpreted by the wife as a form of betrayal of the trust given so far. As a result, participants found it difficult to trust men anymore. Negative emotions that arose were still felt by participants, especially every time they remembered the events that occurred. Nevertheless, participants struggled to continue their lives together with their children and reorganized their lives.

SUGGESTIONS

Researchers can find programs and provide appropriate interventions to help restore the psychological condition of women who divorce due to husbands' infidelity. Women who divorce due to infidelity need to bounce back from a psychological state dominated by negative emotions turning into positive emotions by observing the positive wisdom of the situations they experience. Efforts to reorganize life can be made by doing routine activities or getting themselves to do hobbies or fun activities, both alone and together with children and friends. If they still have difficulty coping with negative emotions, seeking professional help such as a psychologist or counselor is recommended.

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