



Perceived Stress among Gaborone North Women in Relation to Divorce as a Basis for Developing Women's Empowerment Programs within Social Support Groups

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Abstract

This study examines perceived stress levels among women in Gaborone North, Botswana, focusing on how the concept of divorce contributes to psychological strain. The goal is to inform the development of empowerment programs for women within social support networks. Using a descriptive quantitative design, researchers surveyed 46 randomly selected women aged 18 and above through a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms. Stress levels were measured using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), revealing a moderate average stress score (Mean = 23.15, SD = 4.695). Participants varied in marital status—single, married, or divorced—and although most had attained a high level of education, many faced unemployment. The findings indicate that social and psychological pressures stemming from cultural expectations about marriage and divorce significantly affect women's stress levels. The study emphasizes the need for targeted mental health and support interventions. It recommends a culturally responsive empowerment program featuring mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques, access to professional counseling, and organized support groups. These initiatives aim to build emotional resilience and improve the overall well-being of women in the community.

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1. Introduction

Divorce is often identified as a major life stressor with significant psychological, emotional, and social consequences for those involved (Amato, 2019) ^[3]. Divorce is the legal termination of a marriage and can have a significant impact on families in various ways. The negative effects of divorce can include declines in the mental and physical health of parents, behavioral issues in children, and deterioration in children's mental health (Afifi, Boman, Fleisher, & Sareen, 2009; Amato, 2010; Huurre, Junkkari, & Aro, 2006; Jurma, 2015; Sirvanli-Ozen, 2005) ^[1]. However, divorce is also viewed as a transition that begins well before the legal separation and can extend long after the family is no longer together. This process is known as the Divorce Stress-Adjustment Perspective (Amato, 2000) ^[2]. According to this perspective, divorce has both short- and long-term effects that impact various parts of the family, both collectively and individually. The stress experienced by parents and children during this time increases the likelihood of negative emotional, behavioral, and health outcomes, both in the short term and later in life. These outcomes vary between individuals and are shaped by moderating or protective factors, which can either help an individual

adjust successfully or hinder their adjustment to life after divorce (Amato, 2000; Bray & Hetherington, 1993; (Markman, Rhoades, Stanley, & Peterson, 2013) ^[2]; Richardson & McCabe, 2001). Women going through divorce frequently experience significant emotional fluctuations, including shifts between feelings of hopefulness and happiness to anger, irritability, anxiety, loneliness, sadness, and depression. These emotional changes are often accompanied by suicidal thoughts and alterations in self-image and self-esteem. Divorce is widely recognized as a major contributing factor to adult depression. They consistently show higher levels of depression and mental health issues compared to married women. This disparity is often linked to increased stress and reduced social support. Divorced women tend to face more severe emotional consequences, with loneliness being a common challenge. Many report feeling as though they've lost their children and struggle with feelings of inadequacy in their parenting role (Tennant, 2002) ^[15]. These persistent issues need immediate action and support. Mr. Edwin Batshu (2017), the Minister of Nationality, Immigration, and Gender Affairs, has voiced concerns about the rising number of divorce cases in Botswana. However, little research has focused on the perceived stress experienced by divorced women in this specific region or the role of social support groups in mitigating this stress.

According to Cohen (1983) ^[7], perceived stress refers to an individual's interpretation of the level of stress they are experiencing over a specific period. This perception is influenced by feelings of unpredictability and instability in life, as well as the individual's self-assessed ability to manage challenging situations. Research has shown that women are particularly vulnerable to experiencing high levels of perceived stress following divorce due to a variety of factors, including changes in economic status, social stigma, and parenting responsibilities. Studies focusing on Southern African countries suggest that women often struggle with emotional and financial burdens post-divorce, exacerbated by cultural attitudes that still prioritize marriage and family stability (Brickman *et al.*, 1982) ^[6].

The role of social support in alleviating stress has been well-documented in psychological research, with evidence indicating that strong social networks can act as a buffer against the adverse effects of stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985) ^[7]. Over the past three decades, extensive research has demonstrated that social support is essential in daily life, significantly influencing both mental and physical health (Burleson *et al.*, 1994; Heany & Israel, 1995; Uchino *et al.*, 1996; Albrecht & Goldsmith, 2003). In the context of divorced women, social support groups have shown promise in providing emotional, informational, and instrumental resources that promote psychological well-being (Muller *et al.*, 2021). However, research focusing on the application of social support groups in Botswana and similar African contexts is limited, with few studies exploring how these groups can be tailored to the unique needs of divorced women (Twala & Motsepe, 2021). This gap highlights the importance of understanding how perceived stress manifests among women in Gaborone North and how empowerment programs within social support groups can be developed to address these needs. This study aims to explore the perceived stress levels among divorced women in Gaborone North, Botswana, and to examine how social support groups can be

used as a means of mitigating this stress. Specifically, it seeks to identify the key stressors faced by these women, including economic difficulties, social stigma, and emotional challenges, and to understand how support systems can empower them to cope with these stressors. By investigating these factors, the study will propose the development of women's empowerment programs within social support groups that aim to reduce perceived stress and enhance the. The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform the development of culturally relevant, community-based interventions aimed at supporting divorced women. Understanding the interplay between perceived stress, divorce, and social support in this context could provide valuable insights for policymakers, social workers, and community leaders in Botswana and similar settings. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to the broader body of knowledge on women's empowerment and mental health in the African context.

2. Background of Study

Divorce has been conceptualized as a process. Research has extensively demonstrated that pre /post-divorce family environment factors primarily account for the variability in children's adaptation to the parental divorce process rather than the legal divorce per se. Among various factors, interparental conflict has been consistently identified as a prominent one. Surprisingly, a single source is still lacking that comprehensively synthesizes the extant findings (Avci, R. *et al.*, 2021) ^[5].

Divorce has become more commonplace throughout time. This study was conducted to determine if there were any differences between genders concerning the forgiveness of their ex-spouses. Adults are often faced with life issues that are far from pleasurable, such as illness, financial instability, and substantial loss. Many are faced with the loss of a profound nature, which for many includes the loss of a child, a spouse, or a parent, including the loss of a spouse, not to death, but to divorce. Johnson, A. K. (2014) ^[9] discovered that while there is research available that addresses the factors that lead to divorce, most involved personality types, and mental health issues such as depression and anger management.

D'Rozario, A. B., & Pilkington, P. D. (2022) ^[8] suggest that adults with a history of parental divorce or separation are more likely to report anxious and avoidant attachment styles, and this is partially accounted for by an expectation that they will be abandoned by others. These findings have implications for case formulation and can be used to inform treatment. Schema therapy focused on healing the Abandonment schema could promote attachment security in individuals with a history of parental separation or divorce. Limited reparenting (i.e., the therapist seeking to meet the client's unmet emotional needs, within the professional boundaries of the relationship), could be tailored to address overall well-being of divorced women in Gaborone North the individual's underlying unmet need for security and stability. Past research acknowledged numerous reasons for divorce including gender, socioeconomic status, and life course as noted by Amato and Previti (2003) ^[4]; changes in the economy according to Ishida (2003); and finances, religion, and lack of employment were noted by Sember (2009). Most divorces were considered a no-fault divorce, which was also referred to as a divorce granted based on irreconcilable differences. In other words, the reason for the divorce was

due to the couple's inability to resolve issues within their marriage. The words irreconcilable differences run the gamut concerning underlying reasons for divorce, and Sember (2009) suggested that reasons may include the couple simply growing apart, issues arising from gender roles, media influences, financial difficulties, religion, child rearing, employment or lack of employment, infidelity or lack of commitment, and communication difficulties. Letamo, G., & Navaneetham, K. (2015)^[10] concluded that the prevalence of unmet needs for family planning was low in Botswana compared to other sub-Saharan African countries. The findings from this study reemphasize the importance of women's empowerment and men's involvement in women's sexual and reproductive healthcare needs and services. Different approaches are needed to satisfy the demand for family planning for spacing and limiting.

Rakwena, K. H. (2010)^[13] conducted a study in Gaborone, the capital city of the Republic of Botswana, the researcher revealed the importance of gender role attitudes and spousal support as key predictors of marital satisfaction and intimacy when compared to age and gender. Individuals who reported high scores in spousal support and egalitarian gender role attitudes also reported high scores in marital satisfaction and intimacy. Divorce could be viewed as a function of marital discord and or dissatisfaction within the dyad.

Mogotsi, D. (2023)^[11] conducted qualitative research and a case study to explore the association between parental conflict and the aggressive behavior of young children in Botswana, using three districts called Kweneng, Kgatleng, and the Southeast District, which were selected because of their proximity to Gaborone. The study purposely selected 18 participants comprising three categories: six parents who had recently experienced divorce or separation (within the last year); six children (between four and six) who witnessed parental conflict at home; and six teachers. The data analysis revealed that parental conflict is strongly related to aggressive behavior among children, largely due to children copying or modeling the aggressive behavior of their parents; children's frustration leads to aggression, where the parents become aggressive due to their frustrations emanating from divorce or separation.

Mooko, N. P. (2002)^[12] investigated the family information needs and information-seeking behavior of rural women living in Makwate, Modipane, and Paje in Botswana. Women throughout the world have formed themselves into groups because they have common interests or goals. Women's groups are divided in various ways. They are sometimes referred to as formal and informal. The formal groups have some links with the government or with international organizations. The informal groups are characterized by being locally based without any formal linkages. They are Women's organizations are also characterized by the nature of their goals, such as human rights, professional women's associations, service-oriented organizations, developmentally focused organizations, and worker-based. Stiller, M. *et al* (2025)^[14] have demonstrated that seeking social support - both from informal and formal sources - improves intimate partner violence (IPV) survivors coping mechanisms, protecting them against ongoing violence and negative physical and mental health outcomes, including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicide attempts. Social support might be beneficial for IPV survivors by fostering their psychological well-being in

general, giving assistance in defending one's integrity and safety, helping to imagine alternatives to the current violent situation, providing emotional, physical, financial, or material help, and encouraging to seek any further assistance to stop IPV. The low overall help-seeking rates may be explained by an interplay of survivors' individual agency, beliefs, and social context, as well as personal, interpersonal, and sociocultural causes and stigmata which have implications for how survivors define IPV, and whether and from whom they are willing to seek help.

3. Statement of the problem

The purpose of this study was to determine the level of perceived stress among the women of Gaborone North in relation to divorce as a basis for developing women's empowerment programs within social support groups. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the demographic profiles of the respondents in terms of:

1.1 Age

1.2 Marital Status

a) Single

b) Married

c) Divorced

1.3 Religion

1.4 Educational Attainment

1.5 Occupation

2. What is the level of perceived stress among the women of Gaborone North in relation to divorce?

3. What specific Women's Empowerment Programs can be developed and implemented within Social Support Groups?

4. Respondents, Methods, and Instruments The respondents of this study were 46 women aged 18 and above, residing in Gaborone North, Botswana. Participants were selected through probability random sampling, ensuring that each eligible woman had an equal opportunity to be included in the sample.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The instrument included sections on demographic information and a standardized Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) adapted to assess how participants emotionally respond to thoughts or perceptions related to divorce. The questionnaire was developed in English and pilot-tested for clarity before official distribution usually issue-oriented, cooperative, and self-help group.

4. Methods and Procedures

This research followed a quantitative approach. A total of 46 participants were randomly selected and invited to complete the online questionnaire through a secure Google Form link. Instructions and informed consent were provided at the beginning of the form, ensuring ethical participation.

Once responses were collected, data were compiled using Google Forms and exported into a spreadsheet format for analysis. The responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed that the research aimed to explore perceptions around divorce and stress to inform future women's empowerment programs.

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design, appropriate for assessing general trends and perceptions without manipulating variables. The purpose was to describe the level of perceived stress among women in Gaborone North in relation to their thoughts or attitudes about divorce.

By using this design, the study sought to uncover how women perceive the emotional implications of divorce, and how this perception may influence their stress levels. These findings are intended to guide the development of community-based women's empowerment programs within social support groups.

5. Results

This chapter will present and discuss the method that would be used for a systematic collection of data needed to know the result of this study.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Respondents as to Age Range

Age (years old)	Frequency	Percent (%)
18	1	2.2
19	1	2.2
20	1	2.2
21	3	6.5
22	2	4.3
23	1	2.2
25	1	2.2
27	1	2.2
28	1	2.2
29	2	4.3
31	1	2.2
32	1	2.2
33	3	6.5
34	1	2.2
35	1	2.2
36	1	2.2
38	2	4.3
39	1	2.2
40	1	2.2
42	3	6.5
45	1	2.2
46	2	4.3
47	1	2.2
48	1	2.2
49	2	4.3
50	3	6.5
51	2	4.3
53	2	4.3
55	2	4.3
58	1	2.2
Total	46	100%

Based on the table, the majority of the respondents are 21, 33, 42, and 50 years old, with 6.5% of the sample. The next highest category is age 22, 29, 38, 46, 49, 51, 53, and 55, with 4.3% of the sample while 2.2% of the sample is ages 18, 19, 20, 23, 25, 27, 28, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 39, 40, 45, 47, 48, and 58. The remaining categories have relatively lower frequencies, with just 2.2% of the sample. It is important to note that the table only includes 18-year-olds and above. This means that individuals outside this range are not included.

Therefore, the percentage figures in the table only represent the proportion of the sample within this specific age range.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Respondents as to their Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percent (%)
Divorced	3	6.5
Married	21	45.7
Single	22	47.8
Total	46	100

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents by their marital status within the sample. The majority of the respondents are single, with 47.8% of the sample, followed closely by the married respondents, which comprises 45.7%. The very least proportion is respondents who are divorced, with 6.5%. It is important to note that this sample might not represent the larger population, and the proportion of each marital status could differ in another sample or the entire population.

Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Respondents as to their Religious Affiliations

Religion	Frequency	Percent (%)
Christianity	45	97.8
Unspecified	1	2.2
Total	46	100

Based on the table, most of the respondents are Christians, with 97.8% of the sample, while the other unspecified religion comprises 2.2% of the sample. It is important to note that this sample may not represent the larger population, and the proportion of each religious affiliation category could differ in another sample or the entire population.

Table 4: Frequency Distribution of Respondents as to their Educational Attainment

Highest Educational Attainment	Frequency	Percent (%)
Doctorate Degree	1	2.2
Bachelor of Laws	1	2.2
Master's Degree	11	23.9
Bachelor's Degree	17	37.0
Associate's Degree	6	13.0
College Undergraduate Student	9	19.6
High School Diploma	1	2.2
Total	46	100.0

Table 4 shows the distribution of respondents by their educational attainment within the sample. The majority (37%) of the respondents held a Bachelor's degree, while 23.9% held a Master's Degree. College Undergraduate students comprise 19.6% of the sample, followed by Associate's Degree holders at 13%. The remaining 2.2% includes Doctorate Degree, Bachelor of Laws, and High School diploma holders. It is important to note that this sample may not represent the larger population, and the proportion of each educational attainment category could differ in another sample or the entire population remaining categories have relatively lower frequencies, with just 2.2% of the sample. It is important to note that this sample may not represent the larger population, and the proportion of each occupation category could differ in another sample or the entire population.

Table 5: Frequency Distribution of Respondents as to their Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percent (%)
Accountant	3	6.5
Attorney	1	2.2
Banker	1	2.2
Chartered Accountant	1	2.2
Domestic worker	1	2.2
Health care assistant	1	2.2
Internship-laboratory		
Technician	1	2.2
Librarian	1	2.2
Manager	1	2.2
Marketing officer	1	2.2
Midwife	1	2.2
Nurse	4	8.7
Procurement Officer	1	2.2
Public officer	1	2.2
Receptionist	1	2.2
Sales Executive	1	2.2
Self-employed	1	2.2
SHEQ Officer	1	2.2
Social worker	1	2.2
Student welfare officer	2	4.3
Teacher	8	17.4
Therapist	1	2.2
Unemployed	11	23.9
Total	46	100

Table 6: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Total Score of the Perceived Stress among the Women of Gaborone North in Relation to Divorce

N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation (Level)
46	23.15	4.695	Moderate Stress

Table 5 shows the Mean, Standard Deviation, and Interpretation of the perceived stress in the study sample population. The results indicate that the women in Gaborone North have a moderate level of perceived stress (Mean of 23.15 with SD of 4.695) in relation to divorce.

6. Conclusion

The conclusions were drawn from a sample of forty-six (46) women of Gaborone North on assessing their level of perceived stress, particularly in relation to divorce. This study mainly focused on demographic profiling and levels of perceived stress on women in Gaborone North. The findings revealed that most of the respondents in this sample are single (47.8%), followed closely by married individuals (45.7%). On the educational level, the results revealed that most women have attained a Bachelor's Degree (37%), with a significant portion also holding a Master's Degree (23.9%). With regard to occupational status, various capacities have been indicated, and there is a significant number of 23.9% who are not employed, while a notable number of 8.7 % are nurses. It is also highly notable that 97.8% of the respondents indicated that they were Christians.

Regarding perceived stress in relation to divorce among women in Gaborone North, the results show that there is a moderate stress level among women who participated in the study, with a mean score of 23.15 and a standard deviation of 4.695. These findings indicate that although divorce contributes to stress, its effects may differ based on various social and personal factors, including an individual's marital

status, level of education, employment situation, and available support networks.

In conclusion, the findings do not necessarily represent the general population as the study was based on a small sample size of 46 women. As such, the observed proportions and stress levels may not accurately reflect the wider population of Gaborone North women as a whole. To obtain more generalizable insights, additional research involving a larger and more diverse sample is recommended.

7. Recommendations

While the quantitative data collected in this study provides valuable insights into the level of perceived stress among the women of Gaborone North in relation to divorce, future research could benefit from incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups. This approach would allow for a deeper exploration of specific stressors, coping mechanisms, and personal experiences of women, which a purely quantitative approach may not fully capture. Given that this study is limited to the women of Gaborone North, future research could also consider comparative studies with other cities in Botswana or across the broader Southern African region. These studies could help identify regional similarities and differences in the level of perceived stress, as well as provide a more comprehensive understanding of how stress varies between regions.

To further enhance the understanding of perceived stress, longitudinal research is recommended to track how stress levels evolve over time among the women of Gaborone North. This type of study would allow for the assessment of how changes in their perception in life impact stress levels and coping strategies over the challenges of divorce.

Finally, based on the findings of this study, it is recommended to implement women's empowerment programs that can be developed and implemented within social support groups. Such a program could encompass initiatives focused on stress management, mental health resources, counseling, and social support, all of which are crucial to fostering a supportive and resilient social environment. The development of such programs would align with broader efforts to enhance women's success and ensure that they are adequately supported in managing the pressures of life.

Intervention Programs within Social Support Groups

Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Intervention Program Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) aims to enhance awareness of the present moment and reduce stress and suffering. It involves developing mindfulness skills through practices like meditation and yoga, promoting acceptance of thoughts and feelings without judgment. The primary objectives are to improve well-being, reduce anxiety, and enhance emotional resilience.

Goals

1. Enhance Awareness: MBSR encourages women of Gaborone North to focus on the present moment, paying attention to thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations without judgment.

2. Reduce Stress: By cultivating mindfulness, women can learn to respond to stressful situations with greater awareness and less reactivity, reducing the physiological and psychological effects of stress.

3. Promote Acceptance: MBSR will help the women of Gaborone North learn to accept their experiences, including difficult emotions and thoughts, without trying to change or suppress them.

4. Improve Emotional Regulation: Mindfulness practices can help participants become more aware of their emotions and develop healthier coping mechanisms for managing challenging emotions.

5. Increase Self-Awareness: The women of Gaborone North will gain a deeper understanding of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, leading to greater self-compassion and personal growth.

Objectives

1. Develop Mindfulness Skills: Through formal practices like meditation and yoga, and informal practices like mindful eating and walking, participants learn to cultivate sustained attention and non-judgmental awareness.

2. Reduce Rumination and Worry: MBSR encourages participants to let go of dwelling on the past or worrying about the future, promoting a greater focus on the present moment.

3. Improve Focus and Concentration: Mindfulness training can enhance cognitive abilities, including attention span and concentration, which can be beneficial for daily life and work.

4. Increase Resilience: By developing awareness and acceptance, participants build resilience to cope with life's challenges and setbacks more effectively.

5. Enhance Quality of Life: MBSR aims to improve overall well-being, reduce suffering, and promote a greater sense of peace and contentment.

Intervention Program Outline

1. Continuous Availability of Counselling Services

- Individual Counselling: Offer ongoing, personalized sessions tailored to the women of Gaborone North unique challenges, available year-round.
- Drop-In Counselling: Provide flexible, walk-in hours each week for immediate support on pressing issues.
- 24-Hour Support Line: Implement a toll-free hotline and online chat for crisis intervention and continuous access to professional counselling.

2. Social Support Group Formation

- Facilitated Group Sessions: Host regular meetings led by trained volunteers to discuss common women's adversities, especially marital struggles and coping mechanisms.
- Mentorship Programs: Pair younger women with senior women for guidance on strategies for household management and on balancing family and career.
- Destigmatizing Counselling: Encourage open dialogue about mental health challenges to normalize seeking help and foster a supportive culture.

3. Recreational Workshops

- Goal-Setting Workshops: Teach women how to do yoga and meditation. Both are complementary practices that can be combined to enhance overall well-being. Set realistic mindfulness goals, prioritize tasks, and allocate

time effectively.

- Digital Tools Training: Introduce women to digital planning tools for organizing mindfulness tasks and tracking progress.

Program Benefits

- Reduced perceived stress and anxiety through timely access to support systems.
- Improved awareness and cultivating mindfulness as women learn to respond to stressful situations with less reactivity.
- Strong social networks fostering collaboration, resilience, and mutual encouragement.
- Enhanced cognitive abilities, including attention span and concentration, reducing anxiety, and improving decision making.

This program not only addresses the immediate needs of the women of Gaborone North but also builds mindfulness that contributes to personal success.

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