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Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage Trajectories among Generation Z in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Marriage, divorce, and remarriage in Pakistan are embedded within sociocultural structures that emphasize family cohesion, gender based expectations, and collective identity. While marriage remains a highly valued social institution, contemporary social changes have influenced Generation Z's expectations regarding intimacy, autonomy, and emotional fulfillment. The present study explored the lived experiences of Generation Z individuals navigating marriage, divorce, and remarriage within the Pakistani sociocultural context. Using a qualitative research design grounded in Social Constructionism, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight legally divorced Generation Z participants who were actively considering remarriage. Data were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Five major themes emerged: Marriage Ideologies in Generation Z, Idealized Expectations versus Lived Marital Reality, Emotional Suppression and Identity Erosion in Marriage, Psychological Impact of Divorce and Stigmatized Identity, and Post-Divorce Psychological Reorganization and Boundary Formation. Findings revealed that participants entered marriage with hybrid expectations that combined traditional beliefs with modern aspirations for emotional intimacy and equality. Divorce was experienced as both a psychological rupture and a socially stigmatized identity transition. Nevertheless, participants demonstrated resilience through identity reconstruction, boundary formation, and personal growth.

Keywords: Generation Z, Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, Lived Experiences

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is widely regarded as one of the most significant social institutions across cultures, serving not only as a personal relationship between two individuals but also as a foundational unit for family structure, social stability, and cultural continuity. In South Asian societies such as Pakistan, marriage is deeply embedded within religious, cultural, and familial frameworks, where it is traditionally perceived as a lifelong commitment rather than a flexible or dissolvable arrangement. Within this context, divorce and remarriage are not merely individual decisions but socially negotiated processes influenced by family expectations, community norms, and broader socio-cultural values (Qureshi, 2013; Shahid & Shah, 2020).

In recent years, however, rapid social transformation has reshaped attitudes toward marriage and relationship stability, particularly among younger generations. Generation Z, typically defined as individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, has



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grown up in a period marked by digital connectivity, globalization, shifting gender roles, and increasing exposure to diverse relationship models. As a result, their perceptions of marriage, divorce, and remarriage differ significantly from previous generations. Unlike traditional expectations of marital permanence, Gen Z individuals often emphasize emotional compatibility, personal growth, autonomy, and psychological well-being when making relationship decisions. This shift has contributed to changing patterns of marital satisfaction, increased awareness of individual rights, and a growing acceptance of divorce as a potential resolution to marital conflict.

Despite these changing attitudes, divorce remains a socially sensitive and often stigmatized experience in many parts of Pakistan. Individuals who undergo divorce frequently face emotional, psychological, and social challenges, including identity disruption, family pressure, economic instability, and social judgment. These challenges may be further intensified for young adults belonging to Generation Z, who are simultaneously navigating identity formation, career development, and evolving social expectations. The post-divorce phase, therefore, becomes a critical transitional period in which individuals reconstruct their sense of self and renegotiate their understanding of relationships.

Remarriage, in this context, represents another complex dimension of post-divorce life. While it offers opportunities for emotional renewal, companionship, and family rebuilding, it also involves negotiation with previous experiences, family approval, and social acceptance. In collectivist societies, remarriage is often influenced by extended family systems, particularly where parental involvement plays a significant role in partner selection and marital decisions. For Gen Z individuals, this creates a tension between personal autonomy and familial expectations, making remarriage a psychologically and socially layered process.

Furthermore, emotional regulation and identity development are central psychological constructs in understanding how divorced individuals adapt and move forward. Research suggests that unresolved emotional distress, suppression of feelings, and lack of coping mechanisms can negatively impact post-divorce adjustment. Conversely, adaptive coping strategies such as emotional expression, boundary setting, and resilience building contribute to healthier psychological outcomes and improved decision-making in subsequent relationships. Within Generation Z, who are often more aware of mental health discourse, there is increasing recognition of the importance of emotional well-being in shaping relationship trajectories.

Family interference and traditional marriage ideologies remain significant contextual factors in shaping marital experiences in Pakistan. Many individuals continue to experience pressure to conform to culturally defined roles, expectations, and timelines for marriage and remarriage. Such pressures can influence not only the decision to enter or exit a marriage but also the emotional processing of divorce and the readiness for remarriage. In some cases, family systems may provide emotional and financial support, while in others, they may contribute to stress, conflict, and delayed psychological recovery.

Given these complex interrelationships, the study of marriage, divorce, and remarriage among Generation Z is crucial for understanding contemporary shifts in relational behavior and identity formation. It provides insight into how young adults navigate competing demands of tradition and modernity, individuality and collectivism, as well as emotional needs and social expectations. Moreover, it highlights the importance of psychological resilience, communication patterns, and social support systems in shaping post-divorce trajectories.



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This study, therefore, aims to explore the lived experiences of Generation Z individuals who have undergone divorce and are either in the process of seeking remarriage or redefining their relational identities. By examining emotional, social, and cultural dimensions, the research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how modern relationship patterns are evolving in a South Asian context. It also aims to inform counseling practices, family interventions, and policy frameworks that support healthier marital adjustment and post-divorce well-being.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a Qualitative Research Design to examine the complex and sophisticated issues associated with Generation Z members in Pakistan during the marriage, divorce and remarriage process.

Participants

Eight participants (N = 8) aged between 22 and 26 years participated in the study. All participants were legally divorced and actively considering remarriage. Participants represented diverse educational and occupational backgrounds.

Inclusion Criteria

First, respondents had to be legally and formally divorced from their first spouse. Second, participants were required to be in the post-divorce transitional phase, operationalized in this study as actively seeking remarriage.

Exclusion Criteria

Individuals who were not legally and formally divorced, including those who were separated, in ongoing legal proceedings, or informally divorced, were excluded. Individuals who were not in the post-divorce transitional phase, included those who had no intention to remarry, those who were undecided or ambivalent about remarriage, and those who were deliberately avoiding remarriage due to personal, psychological, or social reasons

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

N	Age	Gender	Occupation	Duration of First Marriage	Time Elapsed Since Divorce	Current Remarriage Status
1	22	Female	Student	1 year	10 months	Not remarried
2	24	Female	Jobholder	2 years	1 year	Not remarried



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3	2 6	Male	Private sector Employee	3 years	1 year	Not remarried
4	2 2	Fem ale	Student	<1 year	6 months	Not remarried
5	2 5	Fem ale	Teacher	3 years	1 years	Not remarried
6	2 4	Male	Self- employed Freelance	2 years	11 months	Not remarried
7	2 3	Fem ale	/ Online Work	2 years	8 months	Not remarried
8	2 3	Fem ale	Unemplo yed	1.5 years	1 year	Not remarried

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide designed to explore participants' experiences of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Interviews lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and were audio-recorded with informed consent.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022). Analysis involved familiarization with data, coding, theme development, review, refinement, and interpretation.

Research Ethics

This study adhered to the ethical standards of the American Psychological Association (APA). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were informed about the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured through the use of pseudonyms and secure data storage. Given the sensitive nature of marriage, divorce, and remarriage experiences, participants could decline to answer any question that caused discomfort. Cultural and religious sensitivities were respected throughout the research process, and reflexivity was maintained to minimize researcher bias.

RESULTS

The analysis draws on in-depth, semi-structured interviews that captured participants' narratives of marital idealization, emotional suppression, identity erosion, and post-divorce psychological reorganization. Participants' accounts illustrate the stark dissonance between idealized expectations of marriage rooted in love, companionship, and equality and the lived realities of emotional suffocation, extended family interference, and chronic psychological strain. These experiences highlight how traditional marital norms continue to shape Gen Z lives, even as this cohort is often assumed to embody greater autonomy and modernity.



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Table 2

List of Major Themes and Sub-themes

Major Themes	Sub-Themes
Marriage Ideologies in Gen Z	Traditional Ideological Upbringing Regarding Marriage Glorification of Women's Sacrifice Aspiring for Love in Marriage
Idealized Expectations Versus Lived Marital Reality	Social Pressure to Adhere to Traditional Norms Extended Family Interference in Marriage Emotional Dissatisfaction in Marriage
Emotional Suppression and Identity Erosion in Marriage	Communication Issues in Marriage Feeling Unheard by Partner
Psychological Impact of Divorce and Stigmatized Identity	Divorce as Psychological Loss and Grief Gender based Moral Judgment and Social Surveillance Identity Reduction and Social Devaluation
Post-Divorce Psychological Reorganization and Boundary Formation Following Marital Dissolution	Divorce as Self-Preservation and Psychological Survival Boundary Formation and Identity Reassertion Remarriage as Negotiation of Worth and Safety Fear of Repetition and Trust Caution Digital Spaces as Psychological Support Systems

Theme 1: Marriage Ideologies in Generation Z

Participants described growing up in environments where marriage was framed as a social necessity and moral obligation. Family members often emphasized endurance and sacrifice, particularly for women. These narratives reflected the persistence of traditional marital ideologies within Pakistani society. One participant explained:

“From childhood, we were taught that a woman has to adjust no matter what happens.”

Another participant stated:

“Marriage was presented as something necessary for respect in society.”

Despite these traditional beliefs, participants also desired emotional intimacy, companionship, and equality. This coexistence of traditional and modern expectations reflects broader social changes influencing Generation Z.



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Theme 2: Idealized Expectations versus Lived Marital Reality

Participants entered marriage with expectations of emotional support, mutual respect, and companionship. However, many reported experiencing emotional neglect, poor communication, and extensive family interference. One participant noted:

“I thought marriage would be a partnership, but I felt completely alone.”

Another stated:

“Most decisions involved family members rather than us as a couple.”

The discrepancy between expectations and lived experiences contributed substantially to marital dissatisfaction.

Theme 3: Emotional Suppression and Identity Erosion in Marriage

Participants described suppressing emotions and personal needs in an effort to maintain marital harmony. Over time, this emotional suppression contributed to feelings of invisibility and identity loss. One participant explained:

“I stopped expressing my feelings because every time I did, I was told I was overreacting.”

Another reflected:

“Over time, I no longer recognized myself.”

These narratives demonstrate how prolonged emotional invalidation may erode self-worth and personal identity.

Theme 4: Psychological Impact of Divorce and Stigmatized Identity

Divorce was experienced as both relief and loss. Participants reported grief, loneliness, uncertainty, and social judgment. Female participants described particularly intense experiences of stigma and moral scrutiny. One participant shared:

“People treated me differently after the divorce.”

Another participant explained:

“The judgment from society was harder than the divorce itself.”

These findings highlight the social consequences of divorce within collectivist societies, where marital status remains closely linked to social identity and family reputation.

Theme 5: Post-Divorce Psychological Reorganization and Boundary Formation

Despite the challenges associated with divorce, participants demonstrated resilience and personal growth. Recovery involved self-reflection, identity reconstruction, and the establishment of healthier interpersonal boundaries. One participant stated:

“After the divorce, I finally started understanding who I was outside the marriage.”

Another reported:

“Now I know what I will and will not tolerate in future relationships.”

Participants increasingly emphasized emotional safety, communication, and mutual respect when considering remarriage.

DISCUSSION

The study was conducted to explore the marriage, divorce, and remarriage trajectories of Generation Z individuals in Pakistan. The findings revealed a complex interaction between traditional sociocultural expectations and emerging values emphasizing emotional fulfillment, autonomy, and psychological well-being. Five major themes emerged from the analysis, illustrating how participants navigated marital expectations, marital dissatisfaction, divorce-related challenges, and post-divorce identity reconstruction.



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Marriage Ideologies in Generation Z: Negotiating Tradition and Modernity

The findings indicate that participants were socialized within strong traditional marital ideologies emphasizing sacrifice, endurance, family honor, and marital permanence. In Pakistan, marriage continues to function as a deeply institutionalized social structure shaped by family systems, legal frameworks, and cultural expectations (Abbasi & Cheema, 2025; Ali et al., 2024). Participants' narratives reflect how divorce is still socially discouraged and how marital stability is often prioritized over individual well-being.

At the same time, participants demonstrated emerging modern expectations such as emotional intimacy, equality, and companionship. This aligns with research showing that Generation Z increasingly values emotional compatibility and psychological fulfillment in relationships (Hameed et al., 2025; Kamińska & Mularczyk, 2024). Exposure to education, digital media, and global cultural narratives has contributed to shifting marital attitudes among young adults (Arnett, 2015; Attique et al., 2025).

The coexistence of traditional collectivist values and emerging individualistic expectations created internal conflicts in participants' marital experiences. This dual orientation is consistent with findings that young adults often enter marriage with hybrid belief systems shaped by both cultural tradition and modern relational ideals (Herawati et al., 2024; Ekinici & Canpolat, 2025).

Marital Expectations and Marital Dissatisfaction

A major finding of the study is the mismatch between idealized expectations of marriage and lived marital realities. Participants expected emotional support, communication, and companionship but experienced emotional neglect, restricted autonomy, and family interference.

This aligns with prior research suggesting that marital dissatisfaction often arises when expectations are not met within the relationship context (Fowers et al., 2016; Arocho, 2019). In collectivist societies like Pakistan, extended family involvement significantly shapes marital dynamics, often limiting couple autonomy and increasing relational strain (Shahid & Shah, 2020; Asghar et al., 2025).

Empirical studies in Pakistan also highlight that marital dissatisfaction is frequently linked to gender role expectations, socioeconomic pressures, and family interference (Arshad et al., 2024; Hasan et al., 2020). Participants' experiences reflect these structural constraints, indicating that marital breakdown cannot be understood solely at the dyadic level but must also be viewed within broader sociocultural systems.

Emotional Suppression and Identity Erosion

The findings highlight emotional suppression as a central mechanism contributing to identity erosion. Participants described silencing their emotions and needs to maintain marital harmony, which gradually led to psychological distress and loss of self-identity.

This is consistent with social constructionist theory, which suggests that identity is formed and reshaped through social interaction and cultural expectations (Burr, 2015). In patriarchal contexts, particularly in South Asia, women are often socialized to prioritize relational stability over personal autonomy (Jafri, 2015; Ashfaq, 2024).

Research on emotional well-being in marital contexts similarly shows that chronic emotional suppression is associated with reduced psychological health and diminished self-concept (Fatima, 2023; Cheung, 2010). Participants' narratives demonstrate how gendered expectations intensify emotional labor, particularly for women, resulting in long-term identity fragmentation.



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Divorce as Psychological Rupture and Social Stigma

The findings suggest that divorce functions both as a psychological rupture and a socially stigmatized identity. Participants experienced grief, emotional instability, and uncertainty following divorce, which aligns with established literature on the psychological consequences of marital dissolution (Amato, 2014; Springer Study Group, 2019).

In Pakistan, divorce is also socially stigmatized, particularly for women, who often face moral judgment and reduced social acceptance after marital dissolution (Jafri, 2015; Muhammad et al., 2025). Participants' accounts of social exclusion and labeling reflect how divorced individuals are often reduced to a single stigmatized identity category.

Recent research further confirms that divorced women in collectivist societies face intensified social scrutiny and reduced remarriage prospects due to cultural norms and gender expectations (Alizai et al., 2025; Bibi et al., 2025). However, participants also described divorce as a relief from emotionally distressing marital environments, which aligns with findings that divorce can function as both loss and liberation (Akhter & Ummara, 2024).

Post-Divorce Psychological Reorganization and Identity Reconstruction

A significant contribution of this study is the identification of post-divorce psychological growth and identity reconstruction. Participants reported increased self-awareness, emotional clarity, and boundary formation following divorce.

These findings align with post-traumatic growth theory, which suggests that individuals can experience positive psychological change following adversity (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Similar findings have been reported in studies on post-divorce adjustment, where individuals develop stronger relational boundaries and improved self-concepts over time (Çelik & Nazlı, 2025; Qamar & Faizan, 2021).

Participants' increasing emphasis on emotional safety, communication, and compatibility reflects changing marital attitudes among young adults globally (Whitton et al., 2013; Brown et al., 2019). Additionally, the role of digital platforms in supporting post-divorce coping is consistent with research highlighting the importance of online communities in identity reconfiguration among divorced youth (Wang & Guo, 2024).

LIMITATIONS

It was time bound and conducted on a limited sample, which may restrict generalizability.

Extensive research could also employ methods such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to gain deeper insights into individual experiences.

Perspectives from rural or lower socio-economic groups were not captured, who may experience different social pressures and marital norms.

SUGGESTIONS

Future studies should include participants from varied socio-economic, cultural, and geographic backgrounds, including rural populations, to capture a wider range of divorce and remarriage experiences among Generation Z in Pakistan. Employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) or similar approaches could allow deeper exploration of personal meaning making and emotional experiences. Future research should include longitudinal studies to track how Generation Z individuals adapt to divorce and remarriage over time, focusing on changes in emotional regulation, identity reconstruction, coping strategies, and relationship decision-making.



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IMPLICATIONS

The findings have important clinical, practical, and theoretical implications. Clinically, they highlight how traditional marriage beliefs, family pressure, and emotional suppression shape identity, emotional regulation, and relationship decisions among Gen Z individuals. This suggests the need for counseling interventions focused on adaptive coping, boundary setting, resilience, and post-divorce adjustment, along with culturally sensitive support that considers religious and social contexts. Educational and community programs can further strengthen communication skills, autonomy, and emotional maturity, while digital platforms and peer networks may serve as additional sources of support.

Theoretically, the study supports Attachment Theory, Life-Course Theory, and Identity Reconstruction Theory by showing how early experiences and socio-cultural expectations influence identity development and post-divorce adaptation. Overall, the findings emphasize the importance of structured support systems that promote resilience, growth, and healthier psychosocial adjustment during marriage, divorce, and remarriage transitions.

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