

EXPERIENCES LEADING TO DIVORCE AMONG FEMALE VICTIMS WITH NARCISSISTIC PARTNERS

Sayed Shah Taj^{*1}, Erum Makhdoom²

^{*1}BS Honors Psychology, GCU Lahore

²Lecturer, Department of Psychology Government College University, Lahore

^{*1}shtaj555@gmail.com, ²erummakhdoom@gcu.edu.pk

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22914738>

Keywords

Narcissistic Partner, Pakistani divorced women, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, cycle of abuse and manipulation and social and familial pressure.

Article History

Received: 01 June 2026

Accepted: 23 August 2026

Published: 23 September 2026

Copyright @Author

Corresponding Author: *

Sayed Shah Taj

Abstract

The current research study investigated about the lived experiences of Pakistani divorced women who have survived the narcissistic partner abuse. A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit eight women, four working (age) and four house-wives (age) with duration of their marriage ranging from 1.5 to 5 years. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted face to face, depending on participant's preference in Urdu. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) research design was employed. Four major themes were obtained from the results as follows: Cycle of Abuse and Manipulation, Self-Blame and Cognitive Confusion, Social and Familial Pressure and Emotional and Psychological impact of narcissistic abuse. The current study has implications for the clinical settings, policy departments and legal settings to enhance awareness and develop therapeutic interventions and provide protection to victims with new policies.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is generally considered as a social and emotional institution which is built upon trust, mutual respect, emotional intimacy, and psychological safety. Healthy marital relationships contribute positively to psychological well-being, identity development, and emotional stability. However, if one of the partners demonstrates persistent narcissistic traits, the marriage relationship becomes psychologically harmful rather than supportive. The psychological literature highlighted that intimate relationships involving narcissistic individuals or partners mostly involve patterns of emotional manipulation, coercive control, and psychological abuse that significantly affect partners' mental health, well-being and sense of

self (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2022).

Narcissism is a personality construct characterized by an inflated sense of self-importance, a strong need for admiration, and a limited capacity for empathy toward others. Narcissism originates from the Greek myth of Narcissus, a man who fell in love with his own reflection. It describes patterns of self-absorption which range from traits to full disorder. Individuals show low self-esteem which is masked by grandiosity, social withdrawal due to shame, and vengeful reactions when needs go unmet. The narcissistic traits exist on a continuum within the general population. Maladaptive or extreme expressions of narcissism can significantly impair interpersonal relationships.

Contemporary psychological literature distinguishes between two types of Narcissism. The one is, healthy narcissism which supports self-esteem and confidence and other is pathological narcissism, which is associated with emotional exploitation, entitlement, and chronic relational dysfunction. Narcissism exists on a continuum.

Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5-TR) as a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning by early adulthood (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). NPD requires at least five symptoms from DSM-5 criteria. These symptoms include a grandiose sense of self-importance, preoccupation with fantasies of success, belief in being special, excessive need for admiration, entitlement, exploitation of others, lack of empathy, envy, and arrogant behaviors. Symptoms of NPD emerge in early adulthood and across the contexts, leading to fragile self-esteem sensitive to criticism and is often responded to with rage or withdrawal. Central to this disorder is a fragile, unstable sense of self that relies on external validation ("narcissistic supply") from others. It employs primitive defenses such as splitting, projection, and denial (Kernberg, 1975). Threats to the grandiose self-image results in or leads to narcissistic rage and it manifests as overt aggression or passive-aggressive devaluation or exploitation of another person or partner. People with NPD appear boastful or unlikeable because of which their social and occupational functioning is disturbed and becomes problematic.

The theories which explain narcissism are psychodynamic theory, attachment theory, and trauma-informed perspectives to understand the lived experiences of individuals following divorce from a narcissistically abusive partner. These theories collectively explain the intrapsychic, relational, and post-traumatic dimensions of narcissistic abuse and its aftermath. The experience is best understood through the lens of trauma theory, specifically Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (C-

PTSD) (Herman, 1992). The conceptualization of narcissistic abuse as a relational trauma is central to the literature (Day et al., 2020).

The term narcissistic abuse has gained recognition in clinical and counseling discourse. It is described as involving repeated patterns of emotional and psychological harm inflicted by narcissistic partners. Unlike overt physical violence, narcissistic abuse is often subtle, intermittent, and it is difficult to identify. Common behaviors shown by narcissist include gaslighting, love bombing, devaluation, silent treatment, triangulation, blame shifting, and emotional withdrawal. These tactics create confusion and dependency, leaving victims questioning or doubting their own perceptions and reality (Durvasula, 2019).

Divorce following narcissistic abuse is increasingly recognized as a uniquely traumatic life event. It is often characterized by prolonged psychological distress, identity disruption, and complex recovery processes. Narcissistic abuse involves patterns of emotional manipulation, gaslighting, coercive control, devaluation, and intermittent reinforcement, which may persist during and after the marital relationship, particularly through post-divorce litigation, co-parenting conflicts, or smear campaigns. A relationship with a person or partner possessing narcissistic personality traits is difficult but it is psychologically abusive. This abuse is a systematic pattern of coercive control and manipulation designed to destabilize the partner's reality and erode their sense of self, all to serve the narcissist's need for dominance and supply. Narcissistic abuse is often covert and it is difficult to articulate. It leaves survivors feeling invalidated and misunderstood by family, legal systems, and mental health professionals. Following divorce, survivors or partners frequently report symptoms consistent with complex trauma which includes hypervigilance, self-doubt, emotional numbing, and difficulties in trust and intimacy.

Although divorce is perceived as resolution to marital distress but separation from a narcissistic abusive partner does not terminate psychological harm. Many individuals continue to experience distress through post-divorce legal

conflicts, co-parenting challenges, financial manipulation, and social invalidation. Despite these ongoing difficulties, empirical research has largely focused on narcissistic traits or general outcomes of divorce. Despite NPD's 1-6% population prevalence and its implication in up to 25% of high-conflict divorces involving emotional abuse but clinical interventions remain underdeveloped. Over time, exposure to such toxic relational dynamics lead to emotional exhaustion, diminished self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and trauma-related symptoms. Majority of survivors reported feeling psychologically trapped due to emotional dependency, social pressures, financial constraints, or hope for relational change. Consequently, divorce becomes not only a legal separation but also an attempt to escape a psychologically damaging environment. The quality of life of divorced females which remained with narcissistic partners is extremely affected. They face difficulties in personal, social and financial dimensions of life. Despite growing clinical attention, empirical research and particularly qualitative, survivor-centered inquiry remain limited. There is limited attention to the post-divorce lived experiences of survivors of narcissistic abuse. One major gap includes lack of study on the challenge of Co-parenting with a Narcissistic Ex-partner

Research Question

What is the long-term impact of narcissistic abuse on quality of life of divorced women?

Conceptual Framework of Divorced Females with Narcissistic Partners

The current study is conducted with the perspective of Biopsychosocial Model of Health and Trauma Theory, especially Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (C-PTSD) (Herman, 1992), which focus on psychosocial experiences and the conceptualization of narcissistic abuse as a relational trauma which is central to the literature (Day et al., 2020). The survivors frequently experience symptoms resembling complex trauma, including hypervigilance, intrusive memories, depressive symptoms, emotional dysregulation, social isolation and chronic self-doubt (Herman, 1992). The long-

term psychological conditioning persists beyond the relationship, affecting decision-making, trust formation, and interpersonal functioning. This study model recognizes that psychological consequences of narcissistic abuse interact with emotional responses, coping processes, physical well-being, family relationships, social support, financial circumstances, and cultural expectations. Thus, post-divorce experiences of narcissistic abuse victims are understood as multidimensional rather than purely psychological. Divorce is a major life transition which involves the disruption of intimate relationships, family roles, routines, financial arrangements, and social identities. Divorce may also involve conflicting emotions, uncertainty, stigma, family pressure, and concerns about children and future relationships. Therefore, divorce is conceptualized in current research study as both a significant life challenge and a potential turning point for people. After getting divorce from a narcissistically abusive partner, victims often experience psychological and interpersonal issues like anxiety, fear, emotional distress, self-doubt, loneliness, sleep difficulties, mistrust, and difficulties establishing healthy boundaries (Durvasula, 2019). At the same time, the post-divorce period may also provide opportunities for recovery, increased autonomy, rebuilding self-esteem, identity reconstruction, and personal growth.

Methodology

The current research study utilized a qualitative method research design to explore the effects of narcissistic abuse of partner on psychosocial functioning, antisocial or trust issues in future relationships and symptoms similar to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (e.g., hypervigilance, intrusive thoughts) from the perspective of divorced women in Pakistan. For analyzing qualitative data, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used. Because the phenomenon is subjective, deeply personal, IPA is an appropriate methodological framework to capture the participants' experiential realities and to understand their own sense making rather than measuring

predefined variables by using Quantitative method. A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit eight females, four working (age) and four house-wives (age) with duration of their abusive marriage ranging from 1.5 to 5 years whose partners were narcissistic abusers. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted face to face based on participant's preference, in Urdu language. The interviews lasted approximately 40-50 minutes and were held in privacy. All the interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent, upon completion. Interviews were later transcribed and field notes regarding non-verbal communication and emotional expressiveness were made. Upon receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) clearance, each interview participant provided their written informed

consent. It upheld standards of confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation and conducted in accordance with ethical research principles. It systematically examined the patterns and themes associated with cycle of abuse and manipulation, self-blame and cognitive confusion, social and familial pressure and emotional and psychological impact of narcissistic abuse. Other researches also confirm the credibility of current study findings.

Results

The purpose of the study was to explore the lived psychosocial challenges of female victims divorced from narcissistically abusive partners.

Table 1 Themes, Sub-themes, Quotes Participants Divorced Females of Narcissistic Partner Abuse

Themes	Sub-themes	Illustrative Quotes (Participant's Statements)
Cycle of Abuse and Manipulation	-Intermittent Reinforcement (Love-Hurt) -Gas-light and Blame Shifting -Idealization followed by Devaluation -Emotional Confusion	"I wasn't being treated with respect and value, which I deserved. My mental health was constantly on stake." "The abuse was not physical beating but mental torture was of extreme intensity. Therefore, I was unable to survive in the relationship."
Self-Blame and Cognitive Confusion	-Internalization of Responsibility of Wrong -Doubting Self-Perception -Confusion about Reality of Abuse	"He always blamed me for things which I never did. He always used to confuse me mentally." "Then he behaved as he done bad un-consciously and appeared to feel guilt, showed that he has realized his mistake. He asked for forgiveness, even hold my He used to do all this, so myself feel bad."
Social and Familial Pressure	-Stigma of Divorce -Fear of Family Judgement -Cultural Expectations to stay Married	"When you need support of your family the most, they also perceive your divorce as stigma. That it is a curse and try to protect themselves

who	-Sacrificing Self for Family Honor	from this stigma and force you to maintains the relationship and to go back.” “Because there was societal pressure That we are sisters. If stigma of divorce gets attached to me then will accept my other sisters?”
Psychological and impact response	-Anxiety, Fear, freezing -Emotional Numbness/ Dissociation -Depression-like Symptoms -Trauma Triggers	“I was always in state of fear. I became hyper-vigilant about how things will improve. I responded just with silence. I started to feel extreme anxiety and therefore suffocated. I became sick.” “I become easily afraid of anything which seems violent. Even if the violence is happening on the TV and if others are talking loudly or shouting. I symptoms
immediately start to feel of anxiety or stress.”		

Cycle of Abuse and Manipulation

In narcissistic abuse, there is a deep sense of emotional imbalance and lack of reciprocity within marital relationship. In abusive relationships, care and commitment remains emotionally unacknowledged. Then victims put continuous efforts to preserve the relationship. It suggests a strong emotional investment, attachment and hope for relational stability despite the ongoing neglect. The self-centered behavior of abusive partner appeared to contribute to feelings of devaluation and emotional exhaustion. It reflects the deep psychological impact of prolonged unmet emotional needs, on self-worth and mental well-being of victims.

As Participant no 1

“I was not being treated with respect and value, which I deserved. My mental health was constantly on stake.”

Participant 1 has narrated her feelings of being disrespected and devalued in her marriage relationship. Because she tried hard to

maintain the relationship but nothing was working. She took care of her partner, gave him attention, love and loyalty. But her partner thought just about himself. This negatively affected her mental health.

The narcissistic abuse mostly involves the emotionally damaging nature of psychological abuse within the marital relationship. There may be absence of severe physical violence. In such relations, abuser manipulate and emotionally tease the victim which suggest persistent emotional invalidation and psychological distress. The marital relationship appears emotionally difficult to maintain. Because the ongoing manipulation negatively affects sense of emotional security and stability. There may be hidden yet profound psychological impact of narcissistic emotional abuse on personal well-being.

As participant no 5

“The abuse was not physical beating but mental torture was of extreme intensity. Therefore, I was unable to survive in the relationship.”

Participant 5 has narrated her experience of abuse in marital relationship. She was not

facing much physical abuse but she described that abuse was of psychological nature. Her ex-partner manipulated and teased her emotionally. She felt it difficult to stay in the relationship.

Self-Blame and Cognitive Confusion

The persistent psychological manipulation and emotional criticism by partner can weaken the confidence of victims on their own thoughts, abilities, and judgments. The repeated blaming and negative evaluations may create confusion and self-doubt regarding personal worth and competence. The victims then internalize these experiences by gradually perceiving themselves as inadequate and responsible for problems within the relationship. This internalization reflects the deep psychological impact of prolonged emotional invalidation on the self-identity and emotional well-being.

As participant no 1

“He always blamed me for things which I never did. He always used to confuse me mentally” Participant 1 has narrated that her husband always blamed her for things or mistakes which she never made. He used to confuse her to make her doubt on her own self and on her abilities. He made her feel worthless and incompetent. He always described her as wrong and failure in her life and efforts. Whatever, she does her ex-partner perceived that as her mistake.

In narcissistic abuse, there is a pattern of emotional manipulation in which abusive behavior of partner is followed by guilt, apology, and displays of remorse. This creates confusion about the reality of the mistreatment in those who are being abused. The abuser makes repeated attempts to justify his actions and this influences interpretation of abused about the relationship and weakens their trust in their own perceptions. The victims internalize the blame and question their own emotional reactions and beliefs about misunderstanding partner behavior. This self-doubt reflects the cognitive impact of prolonged manipulation on the confidence about own judgment and experiences.

As participant no 8

“Then he behaved as this was done unconsciously and appeared to feel guilt, showed that he has realized the mistake. He asked for forgiveness, even held my feet. He did all this, that I myself felt bad.”

Participant 8 has described that how her ex-partner mistreated and manipulated her. He first made her feel hurt and then acts like that he did all that unknowingly and unwillingly. He showed that he has realized his mistake and is guilty over mistreating her. Even to prove his guilt, he asked for forgiveness and held her feet. This made her feel that she is misinterpreting his actions and he is a good and caring partner. She felt bad over her own reflection and perception.

Social and Familial Pressure

There is emotional and social burden associated with divorce in Pakistan. The women who take divorce feel the absence of familial support which intensifies their distress during a vulnerable period. All the family members give priority to the preservation of marriage and avoidance of social stigma over the divorced woman's emotional well-being and safety. All these experiences create feelings of isolation, helplessness, and emotional pressure to remain within the abusive relationship. There is strong influence of sociocultural expectations associated with marriage and divorce in Pakistan.

As participant no 6

“When you need support of your family the most, they also perceive your divorce as a stigma. That divorce is a curse and they try to protect themselves from this stigma and force you to maintain the relationship and to go back.”

Participant 6 has narrated her experience of divorce as very challenging emotionally and socially. She described that when she needed the support of her close ones the most, they provided no support to her at that time. They start to fear the breaking of marriage. They perceive divorce as a stigma and curse. They try to make themselves save from this stigma. They

forced her to sustain her marital relationship at any cost. They were forcing her to go back and live in her in-law's house.

The societal stigma attached to divorce can influence the decision of women to remain in the abusive relationship for a prolonged period. This may also include concerns about family reputation and the future marriages of other unmarried sisters. Such situations create intense emotional pressure and fear. In Pakistan, divorce is not only a personal struggle but also as a socially shared burden which affects the entire family. There is strong sociocultural influence of honor and societal acceptance within some societies.

As participant no 2

"Because there was societal pressure that we are sisters. If stigma of divorce gets attached to me then who will accept my other sisters?"

Participant 2 has narrated her experience of divorce, after being abused by her ex-partner. She described that she delayed her decision of abuse for a longer time because of societal pressure. She described that divorce is perceived as a stigma in society, where she was living. She feared this stigma because it would not only affect her own life negatively but this stigma will be shifted or transferred to her other sisters as well. She had fear that if she is labeled as divorced, society will not accept her other sisters. They were still unmarried and this could affect their marriages in future.

Emotional and Psychological Impact of Abuse

Usually, after being abused by partners, victims remain in a prolonged state of fear, emotional suppression, and psychological distress within the abusive marital relationship. The self-consciousness and silence in response to abuse is an attempt made by victims, to avoid further conflict and emotional harm. The abused women or victim may internalize the abuse through heightened anxiety, helplessness, and reduced coping capacity. All this can gradually affect both the emotional and physical well-being. The continuous emotional pressure in abusive relationships can lead to feelings of suffocation, exhaustion, and declining overall health. These symptoms or reactions can be

interpreted as PTSD-related or trauma-related symptoms. But it is usually better to avoid giving a formal clinical diagnosis like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder unless the participant has been clinically diagnosed.

As participant no 1

"I was always in state of fear. I became hyper-vigilant about how things will improve. I responded just with silence. I started to feel extreme anxiety and therefore I felt suffocated. I became sick."

Participant 1 has described that because of abusive behavior of her partner, she was always in state of fear. She became overly careful and self-conscious. She became extremely concerned about how things or abusive situation will improve. Her coping capacity was also very reduced. She never fought back. She responded to abuse with just silence. Because of not expressing her emotions and concerns for a longer time, she started to feel intense anxiety. She started to feel suffocated in her marital relationship. All this impacted her overall health and well-being. She became sick.

The severe prolonged abuse and the post-divorce adjustment period may involve severe psychological problems. Victims may experience depressive symptoms and prolonged periods of sleeplessness. The abusive experiences lead to intense emotional distress and persistent mental preoccupation even after the relationship ends. People who remain in abusive relationship may develop insomnia as a manifestation of ongoing psychological turmoil and emotional exhaustion. Therefore, the abusive experience may continue to affect emotional regulation, rest, and overall psychological well-being of victims, even after separation from abusive partner.

As participant no 7

"Because of Depressive symptoms, I got the disease of sleeplessness. I stayed awake for thirty thirty or forty hours, continuously. Many hours passed without me falling asleep."

Participant 7 has narrated that because of abusive relationship with her ex-partner and even after taking divorce, she faced many

challenges. The most prominent of these were psychological effects, including depression like symptoms and sleeplessness. She did not sleep for 30 or 40 hours continuously, at that time.

Narcissistic abuse by partner has the lasting psychological impact on victims. The psychological impacts include particularly, heightened fear responses and hypervigilance toward cues which are associated with aggression and violence. The victims may become hyper-sensitive to shouting, loud voices, and violent scenes. All these reflect persistent anxiety and emotional dysregulation after the abusive experiences. These reactions indicate that the victims of narcissistic abuse may continue to experience the emotional consequences of trauma in their everyday life. It suggests that exposure to chronic abuse reshape the sense of safety and emotional responsiveness even after the abusive relationship ended. These symptoms or reactions can be interpreted as PTSD-related or trauma-related symptoms. But it is usually better to avoid giving a formal clinical diagnosis like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder unless the participant has been clinically diagnosed.

As participant no 4

"I become easily afraid of anything which seems violent. Even if violence is happening on the TV and if someone is talking loudly or shouting. I immediately start feel symptoms of anxiety."

Participant 4 has narrated how negatively abuse by her partner affected her. She has described that now; she easily becomes afraid of anything which seems violent to her. She has become hyper-sensitive to violence and aggression. She feels anxiety if violence is happening in TV and if someone starts to talk loudly or shouts.

Discussion

The current study aimed to explore the experiences of women who faced Narcissistic Abuse and Divorce. Primarily the interview explains the impact of narcissistic abuse on their psychological well-being to great extent. The findings of the study relate with previous literature on intimate partner abuse and post-

divorce psychological distress among women. Victims in current study, described their experiences of anxiety, fear, emotional numbness, dissociation, depressive-like symptoms, and trauma responses which resulted from prolonged narcissistic abuse. Other similar findings also have been reported in previous studies on intimate partner abuse. In those studies, women were exposed to emotional manipulation and coercive control. They experienced chronic fear, helplessness, shame, dissociation, and psychological distress. Women with histories of intimate partner abuse frequently reported anxiety, dissociation, sadness, and trauma-related emotional responses associated with prolonged abuse. (Newton et al., 2024)

Findings of the current study are also consistent with research which emphasized the harmful psychosocial consequences of divorce and abuse on women within Pakistan. Previous literature has shown that divorced women frequently experience emotional trauma, social isolation, psychological distress, and damaged self-worth because of abusive relationships and societal stigma which surrounded the divorce. Researchers also identified emotional abuse, domestic violence, and societal pressure as major contributors to psychological suffering among divorced women in Pakistan. (Saleem et al., 2025)

Similar findings have been reported in earlier literature, where survivors of intimate partner abuse experienced chronic emotional distress, hypervigilance, low self-worth, and trauma-related coping responses (Newton, 2021; Herman, 1992). The freezing responses and emotional withdrawal also reflect trauma survival mechanisms commonly associated with prolonged abusive environments (Walker, 1979). Furthermore, the findings of the study also align with previous researches which suggested that coercive and emotionally controlling relationships disrupt emotional security, identity, and psychological functioning over time (Newton et al., 2024).

The uniqueness in the current research lies in its phenomenological exploration of narcissistic abuse specifically within the lived experiences

of divorced women, of Pakistan. All the previous researchers broadly examined domestic violence, intimate partner abuse, or divorce-related distress. There was very limited qualitative research which explored how women themselves make sense of narcissistic abuse, trauma responses, motherhood, and post-divorce identity reconstruction within the Pakistani culture context. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) helped the current study to move beyond symptom-focused descriptions. It helped to explore the deeper psychological meanings which participants attached to their experiences.

The study also highlights how narcissistic abuse effect emotional identity, relational trust, maternal meaning-making, and autonomy within a society. Pakistan is shaped by strong cultural expectations related to marriage, sacrifice, and female respectability. Furthermore, themes such as freezing responses, emotional numbness, dissociation, attachment rebuilding with children, and self-transformation after experience of abuse which provide nuanced psychological insights which remained underexplored in Pakistani qualitative literature on divorce and intimate partner abuse.

Implications of the Study

The results of the current study significantly impact multiple clinical, social and policy levels. Firstly, in clinical practice, treatment plans must provide support to victims of narcissistic abuse through psycho-education and counseling. Additionally, health-care providers need proper training in effective communication with victims, their families and in-laws by providing clear and informative communication about Narcissistic Abuse and Post-divorce difficulties to reduce un-certainty and symptoms. Socially, raising awareness about Narcissistic partner abuse and post-divorce difficulties through public campaigns will help reduce divorce stigma and will improve community knowledge. Hospitals, Social welfare and Legal institutions must establish their programs to assist victims of abuse and divorce and create a culture of inclusion within

their regions. Finally, in the area of policy, we must create and implement structured systems of support, including support groups dedicated to victims of abuse and divorced women. There must be established multidisciplinary care programs for such individuals. Creating structured systems of support will improve outcomes for victims of abusive relationships and divorce and will enhance the overall wellbeing of their children and families, as well.

Limitations and Suggestions

One of the limitations of the current study is that the researcher may increase the data for study with variety of demographics. Conducting studies that measure cultural factors that adds up into the literature through tool development. The different settings may have different experiences such as race, religion, income, family background, public facilities and private may all have unique expressions. The key gaps include Insufficient attention to themes of post-traumatic growth and resilience strategies in the context of ongoing threat, Underrepresentation of male, non-binary, LGBTQ+, and culturally diverse survivors and the study do not focus on somatic and physical symptoms of victims. The study results have the following suggestions: Regardless of the fruitful insights about the experiences, the focus of future researcher shall be on enhancing the coping skills of narcissistic abuse divorced victims and their children or families who deal with such situations. The future researchers can also use mix study methods, by combining both qualitative and quantitative research designs. Researchers can also examine protective factors and should investigate factors that facilitate recovery, such as social support, financial independence, spirituality, therapy, motherhood, and personal autonomy.

Conclusion

The current study explores the lived experiences of females following divorce from narcissistic abusive relationships with particular attention to the psychological challenges and processes of post-divorce adjustment and growth. The findings of the study suggest that narcissistic

abuse can have a profound impact on the emotional well-being, self-perception, relationships, and sense of identity of victims. Participants have described the experiences of manipulation, emotional distress, self-doubt, fear, stigma, and social and familial pressures which surrounds the divorce. All these experiences demonstrate that leaving an abusive relationship does not necessarily mark the immediate end of psychological difficulties but rather, recovery may continue as a complex process after divorce. Overall, the results demonstrate the importance of the fact that the search for an effective intervention for the victims of narcissistic abuse with divorce is necessary.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this manuscript.

Funding Statement

This research received no external funding. All activities, including study design, data collection, analysis, and manuscript preparation, were carried out independently by the authors.

Authors Contributions

Sayed Shah Taj has contributed to the study conception, data collection, primary analysis, drafting of initial manuscript, data analysis and interpretation. Erum Makhdoom has assisted in refining the study design, data analysis and led the critical revision of the manuscript. Both authors reviewed and approved the final version and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

REFERENCES

Abramson, K. (2014). Turning up the lights on gaslighting. *Philosophical Perspectives*, 28(1), 1–30.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/phpe.12046>

Baker, A. J. L., & Darnall, D. (2006). Behaviors and strategies employed in parental alienation: A survey of parental experiences. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 45(1–2), 97–124.
https://doi.org/10.1300/J087v45n01_06

Carnes, P. (1997). *The betrayal bond: Breaking free of exploitive relationships*. Health Communications.

Catalano, S. (2012). *Intimate partner violence, 1993–2010*. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Cloitre, M., Courtois, C. A., Charuvastra, A., Carapezza, R., Stolbach, B. C., & Green, B. L. (2013). Treatment of complex PTSD: Results of the ISTSS expert clinician survey on best practices. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 24(6), 615–627.

Dutton, D. G., & Painter, S. (1993). Emotional attachments in abusive relationships: A test of traumatic bonding theory. *Violence and Victims*, 8(2), 105–120.

Dutton, D. G., & White, K. R. (2012). Attachment insecurity and intimate partner violence. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 17(5), 475–481.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2012.07.003>

Earp, B. D., Sandberg, A., & Savulescu, J. (2017). The medicalization of love. *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 43(7), 496–501.

Johnson, M. P., Leone, J. M., & Xu, Y. (2011). Intimate terrorism and situational couple violence in general surveys: Ex-spouses required. *Violence Against Women*, 17(5), 558–585.

Johnson, M. P., Leone, J. M., & Xu, Y. (2014). Intimate terrorism and situational couple violence: Two forms of violence against women. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 76(3), 587–602.

Kernberg, O. F. (1975). Borderline conditions and pathological narcissism. Jason Aronson.

- Newton, T. L. (2021). In their own words: Women's memories of felt emotions during worst incidents of intimate partner abuse. *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 22(5), 563–580. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15299732.2020.1869649>
- Payson, E. (2017). *The wizard of Oz and other narcissists: Coping with the one-way relationship in work, love, and family* (2nd ed.). Julian Day Publications.
- Pincus, A. L., & Lukowitsky, M. R. (2010). Pathological narcissism and narcissistic personality disorder. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 6, 421–446. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.clinpsy.121208.13121>
- Rezey, M. L. (2020). The influence of intimate partner violence on maternal and child health outcomes. *Social Science Research*.
- Saleem, J., Khalil, A., Jahan, N., Fatima, U., & Khan, A. D. S. (2025). Exploring mental health and social support among divorced women.
- Smith, S. G., Chen, J., Basile, K. C., Gilbert, L. K., Merrick, M. T., Patel, N., Walling, M., & Jain, A. (2018). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2015 data brief. CDC.
- Stark, E., & Hester, M. (2019). Coercive control: Update and review. *Violence Against Women*, 25(1), 81–104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801218816191>
- Strutzenberg, C. C., Dyer, W. J., Leckie, G., & Daspe, M. È. (2019). Emotional and psychological abuse in romantic relationships: The role of narcissism and relationship functioning. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 28(4), 437–456. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2018.1540668>
- Van der Kolk, B. A. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Viking.
- Walker, L. E. (1979). *The battered woman*. Harper & Row.
- Warshak, R. A. (2015). Ten parental alienation fallacies that compromise decisions in court and in therapy. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 46(4), 235–249.
- Waseem, J., Muneer, R., Hoor-Ul-Ain, S., Tariq, R., & Minhas, A. (2020). Psychosocial determinants of divorce and their effects on women in Pakistan: A national review. *International Journal of Human Rights in Healthcare*.