

IMPACT OF PARENTAL DIVORCE ON CHILDREN'S SOCIALIZATION AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Parental divorce is a major family transition that can reshape children's emotional adjustment, social relationships, educational engagement, and access to family support. This study examined the relationship between parental divorce, children's socialization, and academic performance in Punjab, Pakistan, with particular attention to emotional adjustment, family support, peer relationships, and resilience. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed. Data were collected from 50 university students aged 19–30 years whose parents were legally divorced. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and completed a structured questionnaire containing demographic questions and 30 five-point Likert-scale items covering academic performance, socialization, emotional adjustment, family support, peer relationships, and psychological well-being/resilience. Data were analyzed in IBM SPSS using descriptive statistics, normality assessment, an independent-samples *t*-test, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression.

The findings indicate that parental divorce was associated with difficulties in emotional, social, and academic adjustment, but the results also demonstrate substantial protective capacity among participants. Female respondents reported higher academic-performance and emotional-adjustment means than male respondents; the gender difference was statistically significant for emotional adjustment but not for academic performance. Pearson correlations showed significant positive relationships among academic performance, socialization, emotional adjustment, family support, peer relationships, and resilience. The regression model was statistically significant and explained 57.5% of the variance in academic performance, with emotional adjustment emerging as the strongest significant predictor. The study concludes that the consequences of divorce are shaped not only by family dissolution itself but also by post-divorce parenting, emotional stability, family support, peer relations, and resilience. Strengthening cooperative parenting, university counseling, peer support, and family-oriented interventions may reduce adverse consequences.

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INTRODUCTION

Family is a primary institution of socialization through which children learn values, norms, communication patterns, emotional regulation, and socially appropriate behavior. When parents' divorce, the family structure is reorganized and children may experience changes in residence, routines, economic resources, parental availability, and social relationships. The thesis underlying this article conceptualizes divorce not simply as a legal event but as a social and psychological process capable of influencing multiple domains of child development.

The effects of divorce are not uniform. Contemporary literature reviewed in the thesis emphasizes that the intensity of parental conflict, post-divorce communication, parenting consistency, socioeconomic circumstances, and availability of supportive relationships can determine whether children experience persistent difficulties or develop adaptive coping strategies. The Divorce Process and Child Adaptation is particularly relevant because

it treats adaptation as variable rather than inevitable. Children may follow different pathways depending on the conditions surrounding separation and the support available after it.

In Pakistan, the issue has additional sociological significance because family relationships are embedded in extended kinship networks, cultural expectations, gender roles, and social perceptions of divorce. The thesis notes that extended families may provide emotional and practical assistance, but they may also reinforce stigma or social pressure. Children may consequently face a dual process: adjustment to changed family arrangements and adjustment to how others perceive their family situation.

Although international research has documented associations between parental separation and children's educational, emotional, and social outcomes, context-specific evidence from Pakistan remains comparatively limited in the thesis literature. Existing work often considers academic achievement, emotional adjustment, and socialization separately. An integrated sociological analysis is therefore needed to examine how these dimensions interact and whether supportive factors can buffer adverse outcomes.

The study addresses three connected gaps. First, it examines socialization and academic performance together rather than as isolated outcomes. Second, it considers emotional adjustment, family support, peer relationships, and resilience as important mechanisms associated with adjustment. Third, it situates these relationships within the social and educational context of Punjab, where divorce may carry stigma and where extended-family structures can both support and constrain children.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The article draws on an integrated understanding of family systems, attachment, ecological systems, and the DPCATT approach described in the thesis. Attachment-oriented reasoning suggests that disruption of familiar caregiving arrangements may create insecurity and affect emotional regulation. Ecological systems theory emphasizes that children are simultaneously embedded in family, educational, peer, community, and wider cultural environments. Therefore, a change in the family microsystem can influence relationships in other settings.

The conceptual model used in the thesis positions parental divorce as the central family transition and

treats socialization and academic performance as major outcomes. Emotional adjustment, family support, peer relationships, school environment, and resilience are considered important intervening or protective dimensions. In this framework, divorce may create economic strain, reduced parental involvement, emotional distress, or social stigma, while supportive parenting, positive peer relations, and resilient coping may reduce the severity of adverse outcomes.

The framework therefore avoids a deterministic assumption that divorces automatically produces poor outcomes. Instead, it proposes that children's adjustment is produced through the interaction of family disruption with post-divorce relationships and institutional supports.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research summarized in the thesis presents parental divorce as a multidimensional family transition. Amato and James (2018) emphasize the importance of economic, parenting, and psychological processes in explaining child adjustment. Brand et al. (2019) similarly show that educational consequences are connected to the resources and circumstances accompanying divorce rather than to marital status alone. Bernardi and Boertien (2016, 2017) highlight heterogeneity in educational consequences according to social background.

Economic conditions are especially relevant. Following separation, household income may decline, and the custodial parent may experience increased responsibilities. Reduced resources can restrict access to educational materials, tutoring, stable housing, extracurricular activities, and other opportunities that contribute to academic and social development. The thesis therefore treats socioeconomic strain as one pathway through which divorce can affect educational outcomes.

Emotional adjustment represents another central mechanism. Anxiety, sadness, anger, insecurity, withdrawal, and difficulties in emotional regulation may interfere with concentration, motivation, and social interaction. D'Onofrio et al. (2019) and Cao et al. (2022), as reviewed in the thesis, support a process-oriented interpretation in which children's outcomes vary with conflict, parenting, and post-divorce adaptation. Frimmel et al. (2024) further emphasize long-term outcomes and the importance of continuing parental contact.

Socialization is similarly affected by the quality of family and peer relationships. Children learn communication, cooperation, empathy, and social

expectations through family interactions and relationships outside the family. High inter-parental conflict may expose children to negative interaction patterns, whereas warm and consistent parenting can support adaptive social functioning. The thesis also discusses peer stigma and exclusion, particularly in settings where divorce is socially disapproved.

The Pakistani context adds a distinctive sociological layer. Extended family members can compensate for lost parental resources, but community stigma can also make children feel different or excluded. The literature reviewed in the thesis suggests that school counseling, teacher awareness, peer-support programs, and inclusive school cultures may provide important protective environments.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was used. The design was selected because the study sought to obtain standardized numerical information concerning the experiences and perceptions of university students whose parents had legally divorced. A structured questionnaire allowed comparable responses and statistical analysis in IBM SPSS Statistics. The population comprised university-going young adults aged 19–30 years whose parents were legally divorced. The research was conducted in selected public and private universities in Punjab, Pakistan. Punjab was selected because of its large and socially diverse university population and the presence of students from both urban and rural backgrounds.

A sample of 50 respondents was selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was appropriate because the study required participants with the specific characteristic of having legally divorced parents. The thesis acknowledges that the small, non-probability sample limits statistical generalization to the wider Pakistani population.

Primary data were collected through a self-administered structured questionnaire. Section A recorded demographic information, including gender, age, educational level, family income, residence, parents' education, duration since divorce, and living arrangement after divorce. Section B contained 30 statements measuring academic performance, children's socialization, emotional adjustment, family support, peer relationships, school environment, and psychological well-being/resilience on a five-point Likert scale.

Response	Score
Strongly Disagree	1
Disagree	2
Neutral	3
Agree	4
Strongly Agree	5

Content validity was supported through review of relevant literature and examination of the questionnaire by the supervisor and specialist reviewers. Items were revised for clarity, wording, sequence, and conceptual fit. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha in IBM SPSS Statistics; the thesis identifies 0.70 or higher as a desirable level for internal consistency.

Participation was voluntary and respondents were informed about the purpose of the research. Informed consent was obtained, participants could withdraw without adverse consequences, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained. Personal information was treated as confidential and used only for scholarly purposes. These procedures were particularly important because divorce and family relationships are sensitive topics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The final analytical sample consisted of 50 university students. The demographic profile shows a modest female majority, a predominantly rural sample, and substantial representation of lower-middle and middle-income families. The findings should therefore be interpreted as evidence from this specific sample rather than as population estimates for all children of divorced parents in Pakistan.

Characteristic	Category	f	%
Gender	Male	22	44.0
	Female	28	56.0
Residence	Urban	18	36.0
	Rural	32	64.0
Monthly income	Below 50,000 PKR	15	30.0
	50,000–100,000 PKR	25	50.0
	Above 100,000 PKR	10	20.0

Females constituted 56% of the respondents, while males represented 44%. Residence was predominantly rural: 64% of participants were from rural areas and 36% from urban areas. Half of the respondents reported monthly family income between PKR 50,000 and 100,000, while 30% reported income below PKR 50,000 and 20% above PKR 100,000. The thesis consequently characterizes the sample as having substantial lower-middle and middle-income representation.

Living arrangements after divorce were also relevant because the thesis identifies residence with the mother as a common post-divorce arrangement. The results indicate that 56% of respondents lived with their mother after divorce. This finding is sociologically important because the custodial arrangement can influence supervision, financial

resources, emotional availability, and contact with the non-residential parent.

The item-level results indicate that respondents experienced academic disruption ranging from mild to moderate or severe effects in the period surrounding parental separation. The article does not treat every participant as equally affected; rather, the descriptive findings show variation in concentration, motivation, participation, and perceptions of academic functioning. The thesis argues that these differences are consistent with a process perspective in which family conflict, economic resources, emotional adjustment, and school support shape outcomes.

Socialization results indicate that respondents retained meaningful social connections despite family disruption. Peer support was evident in the finding that 64% agreed or strongly agreed that friends were understanding of their family background, while 52% agreed or strongly agreed that they had at least one close friend to confide in. At the same time, 50% agreed or strongly agreed that peers excluded them because of their parents' status, indicating that support and stigma can coexist within the same social environment.

Peer indicator	Agree/Strongly agree	Mean
Friends understand family background	64%	3.74
At least one close friend to confide in	52%	3.26
Peers exclude me because of parents' status	50%	3.38

These findings support the thesis argument that socialization after divorce is not a simple process of social withdrawal. Participants may simultaneously experience supportive friendships, social competence, and stigma. The coexistence of these experiences reinforces the need for supportive and inclusive educational environments.

Emotional adjustment emerged as a particularly important dimension of post-divorce functioning. The thesis conceptualizes emotional adjustment as the ability to manage reactions to stress, family change, and interpersonal circumstances. Difficulties may appear as sadness, anxiety, anger, withdrawal, insecurity, or reduced concentration. Conversely, emotional stability can support social interaction and academic engagement.

The resilience results show that a considerable proportion of respondents retained positive expectations and confidence despite previous family disruption. For example, 52% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they felt optimistic about the future despite their past, with a mean of 3.56. Similarly, 62% agreed or strongly agreed that they were confident they could overcome challenges,

with a mean of 3.64. These results demonstrate that exposure to divorce does not eliminate the possibility of positive adaptation.

Resilience indicator	Agree/Strongly agree	Mean
Optimistic about future despite past	52%	3.56
Confident in overcoming challenges	62%	3.64
Satisfied with life currently	42%	3.12

The relatively lower level of satisfaction with current life, compared with confidence in overcoming challenges, is noteworthy. It suggests that resilience may coexist with continuing dissatisfaction or adjustment difficulties. In sociological terms, young adults may develop coping resources while still carrying the effects of family disruption.

NORMALITY ASSESSMENT

Variable	Skewness	Kurtosis
Academic Performance	0.412	-0.125
Socialization	-0.231	0.450
Emotional Adjustment	0.550	-0.780
Family Support	-0.810	1.102
Peer Relationships	-0.320	0.150
Resilience	0.105	-0.201

All reported skewness and kurtosis values fell within the threshold used in the thesis, supporting the normality assumption for subsequent parametric analyses.

GENDER DIFFERENCES

An independent-samples t-test was used to examine whether male and female respondents differed in academic performance and emotional adjustment. Female respondents had higher mean scores on both outcomes. The academic-performance difference did not reach statistical significance, whereas the emotional-adjustment difference was statistically significant.

Outcome	Male M (SD)	Female M (SD)	t	p
Academic Performance	2.95 (0.88)	3.40 (0.75)	-1.85	.068
Emotional Adjustment	2.65 (1.10)	3.15 (0.95)	-2.12	.038*

For academic performance, females had a higher descriptive mean (3.40) than males (2.95), but the difference was not statistically significant at the .05 level ($p=.068$). Thus, the sample provides evidence of a descriptive gender difference but not sufficient statistical evidence to conclude that gender was associated with academic performance.

For emotional adjustment, the difference was statistically significant ($p=.038$). Female respondents reported higher emotional-adjustment scores than male respondents. This result should be interpreted cautiously because the sample was small and purposively selected. Nevertheless, it is consistent with the thesis literature, which discusses the

possibility that boys and girls may display or manage family-related stress differently.

PEARSON CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Pearson correlation analysis revealed positive and statistically significant relationships among the principal study variables. Academic performance was positively associated with socialization ($r=.485$), emotional adjustment ($r=.620$), family support ($r=.595$), peer relationships ($r=.420$), and resilience ($r=.512$). These findings indicate that stronger psychosocial adjustment and support were associated with better academic functioning in the sample.

Variables	Academic	Socialization	Emotional	Family	Peer	Resilience
Academic	1	.485**	.620**	.595**	.420**	.512**
Socialization	.485**	1	.550**	.410**	.710**	.475**
Emotional	.620**	.550**	1	.685**	.495**	.605**
Family	.595**	.410**	.685**	1	.350*	.520**
Peer	.420**	.710**	.495**	.350*	1	.480**
Resilience	.512**	.475**	.605**	.520**	.480**	1

* $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$.

MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Multiple linear regression was used to examine the contribution of family support, emotional adjustment, and resilience to academic performance. The model was statistically significant, $F=24.18$, $p<.001$. The reported R^2 was .575, indicating that the predictors collectively explained 57.5% of the variance in academic performance in the sample.

Model statistic	Value
R	.758
R Square	.575
Adjusted R Square	.552
F	24.18
Significance	.000

Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	β	t	p	VIF
Constant	0.850	—	1.95	.056	—
Family Support	0.285	.345	2.75	.008	1.85
Emotional Adjustment	0.360	.410	3.12	.003	2.10
Resilience	0.210	.255	2.05	.045	1.65

Emotional adjustment was the strongest predictor, with a standardized beta of .410 and $p=.003$. Family support was also a significant positive predictor ($\beta=.345$, $p=.008$), while resilience made a smaller but statistically significant contribution ($\beta=.255$, $p=.045$). The VIF values were below common concern thresholds, suggesting no severe multicollinearity among these predictors.

The regression findings are sociologically important because they indicate that the academic consequences associated with family disruption are not explained only by the occurrence of divorce. The

strongest predictive role of emotional adjustment suggests that the capacity to manage stress and adapt to changed family circumstances is closely connected to academic functioning. Family support and resilience further demonstrate that social resources and individual coping capacity can operate as protective factors.

Taken together, the correlation and regression findings support the article's conceptual framework. Emotional adjustment, family support, peer relationships, socialization, and resilience are interconnected. Academic performance is stronger where respondents report better emotional adjustment and greater family support. Thus, intervention strategies should address emotional and relational processes alongside educational performance.

DISCUSSION

The findings provide evidence that parental divorce is associated with a complex pattern of social and academic adjustment among university students in Punjab. Rather than producing a uniform outcome, divorce appears to interact with emotional, relational, and socioeconomic conditions. This interpretation is consistent with the thesis literature's shift from deterministic views of divorce toward process-oriented explanations.

The academic findings are consistent with literature cited in the thesis showing that family transitions may affect concentration, motivation, attendance, and access to educational resources. Brand et al. (2019) argue that educational consequences are partly connected to the economic and family processes surrounding divorce. The current study adds that, within this sample, emotional adjustment and family support were significant predictors of academic performance.

The strong correlation between academic performance and emotional adjustment ($r=.620$) is particularly notable. Emotional distress can interfere with concentration and motivation, while emotional stability can make it easier for students to maintain routines and educational goals. The regression result reinforces this interpretation: emotional adjustment was the strongest predictor of academic performance. Family support also showed a strong positive relationship with academic performance ($r=.595$) and a significant regression coefficient. This supports the broader argument that family structure alone is insufficient for explaining children's outcomes. A supportive parent or wider family network may provide emotional security, practical assistance, supervision, and educational encouragement even

after divorce. The positive relationship between socialization and peer relationships ($r=.710$) demonstrates the importance of peer networks. The descriptive results showed that many respondents had understanding friends and close confidants, although half also reported some degree of exclusion because of parental status. This coexistence suggests that peer groups may be simultaneously protective and stigmatizing. Inclusive educational settings can therefore become important sites of social recovery. The gender results provide additional insight. Female respondents had significantly higher emotional-adjustment scores than male respondents, while the difference in academic performance was not statistically significant. The result suggests that gender-responsive support may be useful, but the small sample prevents broad conclusions about gender differences across Pakistan.

DISCUSSION IN THE PAKISTANI SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT

In Pakistan, divorce may involve social meanings that extend beyond the immediate parent-child relationship. Family honor, extended kinship, gender expectations, and community judgments may shape how children interpret and respond to parental separation. The thesis notes that extended-family systems can provide compensatory support, particularly through grandparents and other relatives, but can also intensify stigma or pressure.

The results on peer relationships are particularly relevant in this context. Although many respondents reported understanding friends, a substantial proportion also reported exclusion related to parental status. Such experiences can influence belonging, self-esteem, participation in group activities, and willingness to disclose family circumstances. Socialization should therefore be understood as a process occurring across family, peer, university, and community environments.

The findings also support the importance of post-divorce parenting. The thesis literature emphasizes that cooperative parenting, consistent communication, and continued parental involvement can reduce negative consequences. The present study's positive relationship between family support and academic performance is consistent with this process. Where family members remain emotionally accessible and educationally supportive, students may have greater capacity to sustain academic engagement.

Resilience is another important theme. The descriptive results show that many respondents retained optimism and confidence despite their

family histories. This challenges an overly deficit-oriented portrayal of children from divorced families. Young people can develop coping skills, maintain friendships, establish educational goals, and draw on supportive relationships. The significant positive relationship between resilience and academic performance ($r=.512$) and its regression coefficient ($\beta=.255$) reinforce this protective interpretation.

Implications for Sociology

From a sociological perspective, the study demonstrates how a family-level transition can influence educational and social outcomes through multiple institutions. Divorce changes the organization of the family, but its consequences are mediated by economic resources, kinship relations, peer networks, educational institutions, and cultural meanings. The findings therefore support a multi-level approach to family disruption rather than a purely psychological explanation.

The study also highlights the value of integrating family sociology with sociology of education. Academic performance is not only an individual outcome; it is shaped by social support, family resources, relationships, and institutional inclusion. Similarly, socialization is not completed within the household but continues through peers and educational settings.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the impact of parental divorce on children's socialization and academic performance in Punjab, Pakistan. Using data from 50 university students aged 19–30 years whose parents were legally divorced, the study found evidence of emotional, social, and academic challenges alongside substantial protective capacity.

The findings show that psychosocial factors are closely connected with academic performance. Emotional adjustment had the strongest association and predictive contribution, followed by family support and resilience. Socialization and peer relationships were also strongly related to one another. These findings suggest that the educational consequences of divorce cannot be understood by considering family structure alone.

The study further demonstrates that adjustment is heterogeneous. Some participants reported social stigma or academic difficulties, while many retained supportive friendships, optimism, confidence, and meaningful social connections. Divorce should

therefore be conceptualized as a process whose consequences depend on what happens before, during, and after separation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Universities and educational institutions should establish accessible counseling and psychosocial support services for students experiencing family disruption.
- Teachers, academic advisors, and counselors should be trained to recognize emotional and academic difficulties associated with family transitions without stigmatizing affected students.
- Parents should maintain cooperative and child-centered communication after divorce and, where possible, continue shared involvement in educational decisions.
- Family members and extended kin should provide emotional and practical support while avoiding blame, negative labeling, or social pressure.
- Peer-support and mentorship programs should be developed to strengthen social integration and reduce stigma associated with parental divorce.
- Educational institutions should adopt confidential referral mechanisms so students can seek assistance without fear of exposure or discrimination.
- Social welfare agencies and policymakers should consider child-centered family counseling, parental education, and community awareness programs.
- Future studies should use larger probability samples and include adolescents, school-going children, parents, teachers, and counselors to provide a more comprehensive picture.

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

The study has several limitations. First, the sample consisted of only 50 respondents selected through purposive sampling. The findings therefore cannot be generalized to all children of divorced parents in Punjab or Pakistan. Second, the study used a cross-sectional design, so the results identify associations rather than establishing temporal or causal effects. Third, the data were based on self-reports, which may be affected by recall limitations and socially desirable responding, particularly because family

relationships and emotional experiences are sensitive subjects.

Fourth, the respondents were university students aged 19–30 years. Consequently, the study does not directly represent younger children or adolescents who may experience parental divorce differently. Fifth, the study was confined to Punjab and did not include Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, or other geographical contexts. Finally, the thesis methodology includes a broad conceptual discussion of mediation and school-related factors, but the reported inferential analyses in the results focus primarily on correlations, gender comparisons, and regression predictors of academic performance.

Directions for Future Research

Future research should employ larger and more representative samples across provinces and urban-rural settings. Longitudinal research would be particularly valuable because academic and social effects may change over time. Studies should also compare children from divorced, separated, and intact families while controlling for pre-divorce conflict, socioeconomic status, parental education, and family size.

Mixed-method research could deepen understanding by combining standardized measures with interviews involving students, parents, teachers, counselors, and extended family members. Qualitative evidence would help explain how stigma, family support, gender expectations, and coping strategies operate in everyday life. Future research should also test mediation and moderation models more directly, particularly whether emotional adjustment mediates the association between family disruption and academic outcomes and whether family support or resilience buffers adverse effects.

Practical Contribution

The study's principal practical contribution is the identification of modifiable protective factors. Emotional adjustment, family support, and resilience are not simply fixed characteristics; they can be strengthened through counseling, supportive parenting, peer networks, and inclusive educational environments. Intervention should therefore move beyond treating divorce as an unavoidable source of failure and instead focus on strengthening the social systems surrounding affected young people.

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