



ISSN: 3006-7251 (Online)

**MBSTU Journal of Science and Technology**

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69728/jst.v11.89>

Journal Homepage: <https://journal.mbstu.ac.bd>



## The Influence of Divorce on Women Empowerment in Bangladesh: An Exploratory Study

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History

Received: 21 June 2025

Revised: 28 July 2025

Accepted: 9 August 2025

Published: 18 August 2025

#### Keywords

Divorce, Women

Empowerment, Bangladesh

### ABSTRACT

Understanding the challenges faced by divorced women is essential to address the long-term impacts of domestic violence and fostering empowerment among survivors. This study explores the reasons behind abusive behavior faced by divorced women from their former husbands and examines their employment challenges. Using qualitative methods, primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with seventeen divorced women in Tangail district, selected for its high prevalence of domestic violence-related crimes and further coping strategy after divorce based on the semi-structured questionnaire. Employing Walby's theoretical framework, the study identifies key risk factors across multiple dimensions, including male dominance, masculinity, and economic aggression at the individual level. Findings reveal that legal systems play a crucial role in helping women rebuild their lives and achieve economic independence, though lengthy procedures and post-separation threats from ex-husbands remain significant concerns. Many women endure long-term abuse, with some hesitant to report due to fear. Mental health struggles, such as low self-esteem and anxiety about their children's future, persist post-separation. Despite trauma, many divorced women demonstrate resilience and empowerment. The study calls for stronger societal and legal interventions to prevent spousal abuse and ensure long-term safety for survivors.

### 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Separation is usually a mutual decision made by two individuals after considering personal and surrounding circumstances, and both men and women are involved in the issues leading it. However, in our social context, women are more often blamed than men. They face various forms of harassment, although men can also experience mistreatment, women are subjected to it much more frequently and harshly. Moreover, in a patriarchal society being divorced (labeled as a widow—a kind of humiliation) women faces several challenges. Family and community oppression also badly affect women in their divorce and post-divorce life. Women's experienced violence directly by their spouses, re-experience it from their families, and escaping from this never-ending violence becomes even harder due to society's rules (Kelebek-Küçükarslan & Cankurtaran, 2022). Divorce is not seen as a common occurrence in our society. The belief that girls are solely responsible for all vices strictly maintained in our culture (Akter, 2024). Multiple types of physical abuse faced women in their married lives often

they were slapped, kicked, punched, hit with fists, pushed, pinched and had their hair pulled by their husbands (Das et al., 2016). Domestic violence affects millions of individuals in the world, with intense psychological, social, and legal consequences. It is considered a form of behavior in any relationship used to obtain or keep power and control over an intimate partner. For women in many parts of the world, violence is a leading cause of harm and impairment, as well as a threat to their physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health problems (Kabir et al., 2019) (United Nations, 2021). Due to different obstacles from society and personal life women faced many mental and emotional problems in their life (Zafar & Kausar, 2014).

Gender roles are authoritarian in South Asia, where patriarchal concepts are well established and extensive, emphasizing male dominance in many aspects of daily life (Leonardsson & Sebastian, 2017). The latest statistics published by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS, 2013) reveal that 87% of married women have experienced some forms of violence by their husbands, of which 65% faced physical, 34% faced sexual and 80%

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faced psychological violence in Bangladesh, although the Domestic Violence Act was passed in 2010. In many cases, the husband and his family members considered that violence was a familial issue, a personal matter that was frequently ignored, and was not to be discussed publicly in Bangladesh, the BBS (2013) further suggests that DV persisted across all socio-economic strata (Schuler & Islam, 2008). About two-thirds of married women faced physical violence by their husband or partner, approximately 61.5 % of women shared about their sexual violence experience's and almost 13.9% of respondents have experienced psychological violence (Kabir et al., 2019).

Several studies have highlighted the impact of violence and marital separation of women (Zhang, 2022; Ismayilova et al., 2023; Porthan et al., 2020; Ajlan, 2020). A report from the World Health Organization (WHO), domestic violence by a partner is experienced by approximately 30% of women worldwide (WHO, 2022). According to a study in Bangladesh 66% of women in urban slums experience domestic violence (M. A. K. Chowdhury et al., 2021). 41.5% of Egyptian women have been experiencing domestic violence, with psychological violence being the most common (Lotfy et al., 2019). 80% of respondents believed that IPV was never justified who have used the internet whereas 69.2% of rural women disproving IPV in Bangladesh (Ara et al., 2023). Violence is a powerful risk factor in the family of origin that has emerged male spousal aggression (Naved & Persson, 2005). For many health-care problems, abuse is a risk factor and it contributes such factors as smoking, poor nutrition, substance abuse, and stress, interventions which focused at these issues will not succeed without addressing intimate partner violence (Campbell, 2002). Several assaulted women in Vietnam are forced to persist in violent relationships in order to social conventions restricting them from seeking divorce (Vu et al., 2014). Domestic violence was a crucial cause of divorce of Syrian refugees in Germany, with family disputes get worse by refugee status. Religion and traditions of the forced migrants, asylum law and family legislation of the host society, the difference in gains from divorce and marriage and the conflict of interests between women and men, as well as the special structure of the refugee community contribute to divorce and domestic violence (Ajlan, 2022).

Domestic violence victims have hardly any decision-making authority in their own houses (Kabir, 2019). Domestic violence cases surged during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a rise in family disputes and rate of divorce in China (Zhu et al., 2021)

Bangladeshi research suggests that divorced women have severe economic challenges, with many finding it harder to make ends meet (Akter, 2024). Women who separated because of domestic violence recognized ongoing psychological suffering and fear long after their separation, according to a Turkish study (Kelebek-Küçükarslan & Cankurtaran, 2022). Women pursuing

divorce face certain challenges in Israel's Orthodox communities due to social and religious aspects (Kaye, 2020). Many women had suffered a long-term and serious physical violence as well as psychological and sexual abuse sometimes. It forms numerous damage to property, such as the destruction of furniture, and the burning of vehicles and beds, as well as violence to the person such as being trampled upon, slapped in the face and being beaten either by hands or with implements such as sticks, water pipes and lighting tubes (Vu et al., 2014). 43.4% of pregnant women experienced domestic violence including physical, psychological and sexual violence during their pregnancy (Almeida et al., 2017).

There is a few study on how traditional values in Bangladesh and South Asia affect women's divorce decisions (Das et al., 2016) and how legal frameworks influence women's decision-making regarding divorce, especially in conservative societies (Haque et al., 2022). Some studies have focused more on financial implications, with limited exploration of emotional trauma and resilience strategies among divorced women (Kelebek-Küçükarslan & Cankurtaran, 2022).

There is a noticeable gap in research exploring how traditional values in Bangladesh and South Asia affect women's decisions regarding divorce and women empowerment after divorce. Although some studies have addressed the financial implications of divorce, few have deeply explored emotional trauma and the resilience strategies employed by divorced women but there is a gap between the empowerment women struggles after divorce.

In light of these limitations, the present review is crucial to delve deeply into the literature at the impact of divorce on women empowerment in Tangail, Bangladesh. The present study provides empirical data on the nature and causes of domestic violence among divorced women, family and social support for divorce initiatives, the impact of divorce on women, and the coping strategies of divorced women.

### 1.1 Objectives of the Study:

The following objectives have been considered:

- i) To explore the causes of divorce by women.
- ii) To find the family and social support for divorce initiatives.
- iii) To identify the impact of divorce on women.
- iv) To illustrate the coping strategies of divorced women.

## 2. METHODS OF THE STUDY

This study has adopted qualitative approach to gain a holistic understanding of the experiences related to divorced women subjected to domestic violence. Both primary and secondary data has been used in fulfilling the research objectives. Following previous studies on divorced women (M. A. K. Chowdhury et al., 2021; Kabir et al., 2019; Akter, 2024), this study predominantly employed in depth interviews and complemented them with the abused victim women to gather comprehensive

data and uncover nuanced insights. The primary data has obtained through in-depth interviews of divorced women involved face-to-face interviews with the victims. The in-depth interview has chosen for its efficiency in reaching a broad spectrum of participants, the interviews has employed to delve into the specific challenges and responses of divorced women in Bangladesh. For secondary data, literature review and document analysis methods has used. Data has been collected from Tangail district of Bangladesh. The reason for choosing Tangail district is, it is a blend of urban, semi-urban, and rural settings. Women of Tangail faced several domestic violence (Kamruzzaman, 2015). Additionally, various reports indicate that divorce, while legally permitted and increasingly common in Bangladesh. Still carries a strong social stigma, especially for women and in rural and semi-urban areas like Tangail, divorced women often face social ostracization, economic marginalization, and psychological distress (Bangladesh VAW Survey 2011). To obtain the data the recruitment of informants was designed purposive. The saturation point of the sample was 17. All the ethical considerations have been followed throughout the study. Thematic analysis has been done to analyze the data from the case studies. To concentrate on rendering the data meaningfully by interpreting from their perspectives through a process of meaning condensation, interpretation and data structuring have been done. During data presentation, a concept-driven categorizations has been done of the data based on the themes in order to provide a systematically organized structure to the study.

### 3. FINDINGS

The studies employ a range of interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks to analyze gender-based violence and divorce dynamics. Feminist theories, particularly intersectional feminism (Crenshaw, 1989) and patriarchal theory (Walby, 1990) dominate many analyses, revealing how overlapping oppressions of gender, class, and rurality compound vulnerabilities ((Kabir et al., 2019);(Kaye, 2020)). Several studies utilize social control theory (Hirschi, 2017) and structural violence theory (Galtung, 1969) to examine institutional failures in preventing abuse, as seen in police corruption cases (Zhang, 2022) and healthcare system gaps (Lotfy et al., 2019). Health-focused research frequently applies the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to map multi-level risk factors (Porthan et al., 2020) and trauma theory (Herman, 1992) to assess psychological impacts (Ismayilova et al., 2023). Economic perspectives like the economic theory of the family explain resource control dynamics (Bowlus & Seitz, 2006), while social norms theory deciphers cultural justifications for violence (Vu et al., 2014). Emerging frameworks like resilience theory highlight adaptive coping strategies (Kelebek-Küçükarslan & Cankurtaran, 2022) and life course perspective (Elder, 1998) tracks long-term victimization trajectories (Einiö et al., 2023). Collectively, these theories reveal how macro-structural

inequalities (feminist or structural theories), micro-level interactions (social learning theory), and institutional environments (routine activities theory) interact to perpetuate marital violence across contexts.

Over the time different Criminological theories such as integrated theory (Krohn, n.d.), feminist theory (MacKinnon, 1989), patriarchal theory (Walby, 1990), intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989), social control theory (Hirschi, 2017), structural violence theory (Galtung, 1969), trauma theory (Herman, 1992), ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), life course perspective (Elder, 1998), have provided divorce and domestic violence researcher with a century's worth of valuable propositions and empirical findings.

Critical for understanding how overlapping identities (e.g., rural, low-income women) face compounded oppression (Crenshaw, 1989) also introduced intersection of the limitations of mainstream feminist and anti-racist theories, which often failed to consider how black women and other marginalized groups experienced overlapping oppressions and highlighted that treating race and gender as mutually exclusive categories ignores the experiences of people who are marginalized by both. Lower-caste women in South Asia face unique dowry violence patterns (Das et al., 2016). Patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women, not just about individual attitudes or behaviors but deeply embedded in societal institutions (Walby, 1990) it adapts and reshapes itself over time, depending on the socio-economic context. Here also discussed how patriarchy and capitalism interact, sometimes in conflict and sometimes in cooperation, in shaping gendered inequalities. People refrain from deviance when they have strong bonds to society through attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Domestic violence or institutional neglect, weak social bonds (e.g., isolation from family, poor community ties, lack of trust in institutions) make it easier for abuse to occur and persist. Aligns with (McKay et al., 2022) who explored institutional failures, such as lack of intervention from police or welfare agencies which reflect weakened social controls and oversight.

Interpersonal violence, such as abuse or domestic violence, leads to psychological trauma and long-term mental health consequences like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Herman, 1992). There are some limitations on the risk of victim-centric focus, diverting attention from perpetrator accountability. Culturally biased measures of trauma (e.g., Western diagnostic tools may misclassify non-Western survivors). Human development within multiple, nested environmental systems, each layer from individual to societal influences behavior and outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and (Haque et al., 2022) apply this model to show how micro-level domestic abuse is exacerbated by macro-level factor.

Human development as shaped by the timing, sequence, and context of life events over time, emphasizes how individual lives are linked across generations and shaped



by both personal choices and historical or social contexts (Elder, 1998).

### 3.1. Causes of Divorce

#### 3.1.1 Domestic Violence (Physical & Psychological Abuse)

Several women reported they did not know whether their husbands came from violent environment. Surprisingly, unknown family backgrounds spouses are also more likely to be abusive. Unemployment in the past twelve months is more likely abusive husbands category and are less likely to have a university education than non-abusive spouses (Bowlus & Seitz, 2006). Although, the above cases also have some abusive husbands with the categories whereas most of the abusive husbands are uneducated or only completed primary education. Even most of the respondents thought domestic violence as their family issues which might not be out from their homes.

##### 3.1.1.1 Severe Physical Abuse

In nearly all the cases, physical abuse was a recurring and severe form of violence. Many women described being slapped, punched, kicked, and even beaten with objects like sticks or utensils. This type of violence often left them with visible scars, broken bones, and internal injuries, requiring hospitalization in many cases. The frequency and intensity of such assaults indicate the normalization of physical violence within marital homes.

*"He beat me so severely that I often fainted. Sometimes, he had to take me to the doctor." (Case 1)*

*"He would lock the door and beat me inside the house. I felt like escaping just to survive." (Case 13)*

*"He was addicted to drugs and beat me until I bled. Our child was terrified of him." (Case 10)*

##### 3.1.1.2 Psychological Torture

Psychological abuse was another dominant form of violence. This often-included verbal humiliation, threats of abandonment, public shaming, and the use of derogatory language. In many instances, the emotional torture was more enduring than physical abuse, as it eroded their self-esteem and sense of identity. Amina's husband forced her into 16-hour video calls, insulting her nonstop and Case 8's husband brought another wife home and threw her out at night. Whereas, Masuma's husband threatened divorce whenever she tried to communicate. The deliberate locking of the room prior to assault indicates premeditation and a clear intent to avoid intervention, which intensifies the psychological trauma. Moreover, some survivors mentioned that such violent episodes began as early as the first week of marriage, marking the beginning of an enduring cycle of abuse. Constant fear, uncertainty, and abuse-induced stress triggered long-term anxiety. Women reported panic attacks, insomnia, and hypervigilance as part of their daily lives.

#### 3.1.2. Infidelity & Betrayal

Several participants discovered after marriage that their husbands were already married or had children from previous relationships—information deliberately kept secret.

*"I discovered my husband already had another wife and children. He had hidden this from me." (Case 4)*

*"He was involved with another woman. When I confronted him, he beat me!" (Case 6)*

*"At 1 AM, he brought another woman home, married her, and threw me out with nothing." (Case 8)*

These acts of deception created immediate distrust and a sense of betrayal. In many cases, the women were expected to silently accept their roles as cowives, often under patriarchal justifications.

#### 3.1.3 Financial Exploitation

In some cases, the grooms manipulated the women emotionally into marriage by making false promises of love, loyalty, or freedom—only to completely change their behavior post marriage.

*"He took all the money I earned from tutoring. I had to work like a servant." (Case 15)*

*"He took 2.5 lakh taka from my father and vanished abroad. He never sent us anything." (Case 16)*

These stories reflect a bait and switch strategy used to secure the marriage and then exert control, often leaving the woman emotionally stranded. Forced Labor of Case 15 who was denied food and worked like a servant and Case 10's husband refused to contribute to household expenses.

#### 3.1.4 Dowry and Family Pressure

In addition to abuse from husbands, some women faced harassment from mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, or male relatives within the joint family. The husbands' failure to protect their wives—or worse, their support for the abusers—deepened the victims' trauma and reinforced a toxic environment.

*"My husband demanded 2 lakh taka dowry. When my father couldn't pay, he tortured me." (Case 17)*

*"My mother-in-law slapped me in front of my father. That was the final straw." (Case 14)*

In some cases, there is passive complicity even when in-laws didn't actively abuse, their refusal to intervene or support the victim allowed the husband's abuse to continue.

*"His nephew made indecent proposals to me, and my husband supported him." (Case 3)*

This silence and indifference served to normalize abuse and send the message that the woman had no allies in the household.

#### 3.1.5 Forced and Early Marriage

Many women reported that their families arranged their marriages based on social standing, financial concerns, or cultural expectations, with little regard for the woman's willingness or emotional readiness. Some participants were married off at a very young age, before they had

the capacity to give informed consent or understand the long-term implications of marriage. Such early unions contributed to imbalances in power and a lack of preparedness, making the young women particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

*"I was married at 15. From the next day, my husband started beating me." (Case 9)*

*"I didn't want to marry him, but my family forced me." (Case 15)*

In these situations, the family viewed the marriage as a transaction or alliance, prioritizing reputation or financial gain over the daughter's well-being. Women felt trapped in roles chosen for them without consultation.

### 3.2 Support Systems

#### 3.2.1 Parental Support

Most of the cases highlighted that their parents were supportive to make decision and the financial issues also handled by encouraging economically stable with motivational words which is a positive sign. Most women returned to parental homes after abuse. Although some respondents thought they defamed their parents by marrying only her choice guy, in the view of their parents even did not think their fame they just think to escape their child from torture and make a good life for them. Raising children alone—initially seen as a daunting burden—became a point of pride. Many women reported feeling stronger as mothers, knowing that their efforts provided safety and stability for their children. Parenting post-divorce became a symbol of strength rather than shame.

*"When I told my parents, they said, 'Leave him.'" (Case 1)*

*"My father took me home immediately after the abuse." (Case 14)*

#### 3.2.2 Societal Stigma vs. Acceptance

In normal sense of our so-called society, most of the women thought the society and family might create issues but surprisingly they felt safe and the society and family fully supported them to their decision

*"I stayed for years thinking, 'What will people say?'" (Case 3)*

*"Surprisingly, my community respected me after I left." (Case 8)*

Even after their divorce most of the women established whatever the causes, their society encourage them for their future settlement. Despite experiencing intense emotional suffering, many women avoided seeking help due to fear of judgment, cultural taboos, or lack of access to professional mental health services.

### 3.3 Impact of Divorce

Survivors of domestic violence in the case studies consistently reported profound mental health struggles, shaped by prolonged exposure to abuse, emotional neglect, and social isolation. While some symptoms were silent, others resulted in hospitalizations, suicide attempts, and long-term trauma. The burden of mental suffering was often magnified by societal stigma, lack of access to support services, and the normalization of suffering in patriarchal households.

#### 3.3.1 Psychological Trauma

Several women developed chronic illnesses—such as ulcers, anemia, migraines, and even cardiovascular issues—that they directly attributed to emotional trauma and prolonged stress. Continuous humiliation, gaslighting, and emotional abuse left many women doubting their worth, intelligence, and basic capabilities. This erosion of identity often made it harder for them to imagine life outside of abuse. Despite experiencing intense emotional suffering, many women avoided seeking help due to fear of judgment, cultural taboos, or lack of access to professional mental health services. Continuous humiliation, gaslighting, and emotional abuse left many women doubting their worth, intelligence, and basic capabilities. This erosion of identity often made it harder for them to imagine life outside of abuse.

*"I attempted suicide but stopped for my baby." (Case 8)*

*"I fell into depression, constantly asking why women suffer so much." (Case 10)*

#### 3.3.2 Economic Hardship

Economic dependency and dowry harassment were not just financial issues—they were deliberately used to exert emotional pressure, enforce obedience, and make the woman feel like a burden. In cases where women worked or had savings, their earnings were often seized by their husbands or in-laws. Some were even forced into work to meet the family's financial demands, yet had no say over the use of the money.

*"I work in a factory now. It's hard, but I must support my son." (Case 6)*

*"I do handicrafts to survive. My father's small business isn't enough." (Case 16)*

#### 3.3.3 Child Related Struggles

While the abuse in these cases was often directed at women, children were not immune to its effects. They became **collateral victims**, bearing silent witness to the violence within the household. Their emotional distress, changes in behavior, and psychological trauma reflected the deep impact of growing up in an abusive environment. Children exposed to domestic violence often exhibited visible signs of psychological trauma. Many became fearful, withdrawn, or emotionally unstable. Several women reported that their children actively avoided their fathers or expressed fear and hatred toward them, indicating a breakdown in the paternal bond. At the same time, the presence of children acted as both a motivator and a constraint for the mothers—strengthening their will to endure or complicating their decision to leave.

*"My son trembles when he sees men. He never calls his father 'Abba.'" (Case 4)*

*"They're trying to marry off my daughter at 16. I won't allow it." (Case 11)*

### 3.4 Coping Strategies

Divorce, once perceived as a social curse for women, emerged as a **catalyst for transformation** in many of the case studies. Rather than leading to further isolation, it

opened the door to **economic independence, personal healing, and social validation**. For these survivors, post-divorce life became a journey of empowerment, not just survival. Parents and siblings provided emotional stability. Their achievements challenged societal expectations and redefined womanhood in the context of resilience and renewal. Beyond financial gain, the post-divorce period allowed women to **reconnect with themselves**. They described feeling lighter, more in control, and emotionally stable without the constant pressure of abuse. The spiritual and emotional rebirth was as important as economic empowerment, contributing to long-term healing and dignity.

### 3.4.1 Financial Independence

Most women actively sought vocational training or educational opportunities after divorce, learning skills such as tailoring, handicrafts, computing, and teaching. These new avenues of income allowed them to break the cycle of financial dependency. Some women went beyond basic employment to launch micro-businesses or work independently. They engaged in home-based tailoring, mobile recharge booths, food delivery, and craft shops.

*"I learned computers and sell handicrafts. This Eid, I earned 2,000 taka!" (Case 8)*

*"I'm a teacher now. My salary isn't much, but I'm free." (Case 1)*

These activities weren't just a means of survival—they became symbols of agency and productivity, reversing years of perceived helplessness. Economic self-sufficiency emerged as a cornerstone of their advocacy, allowing women to escape abusive relationships without feeling trapped by financial dependency.

### 3.4.2 Legal Action

Once connected to legal aid services, women reported a shift in mindset. Counselors not only offered legal direction but also emotional encouragement that restored their confidence and resolve. Legal services helped women file for divorce, claim their dower money (denmohor), and obtain protection from further abuse. In some cases, lawyers negotiated settlements or provided courtroom representation.

*"Legal Aid helped me claim my dower money. I finally got justice." (Case 9)*

*"I sued for unpaid denmohor. The court ruled in my favor." (Case 14)*

Legal aid institutions often worked in tandem with women's shelters, NGOs, or counseling centers—offering holistic support. This network of services helped women break out of their isolation and feel part of a protective community. Though in two cases respondents faced few issues.

*"The police took 1,100 taka and did nothing. Legal Aid finally helped me." (Case 4)*

*"We filed a case, but the system was slow. Legal Aid secured my divorce." (Case 13)*

### 3.4.3 Emotional Resilience

In a powerful testament to resilience and transformation, many women who survived abuse and divorce not only rebuilt their lives but became advocates for others, spreading knowledge and empowerment. They began to see their suffering as part of a larger systemic issue and were determined to ensure that future generations would not have to endure the same fate. This advocacy was rooted in a growing sense of justice, self-awareness, and solidarity, as these women used their experiences to become changemakers.

*"Now I tell every woman: Don't suffer silently. Speak up!" (Case 3)*

*"My child gives me strength. I fight for her future." (Case 10)*

### 3.4.4 Community Advocacy

Many women who had suffered through abuse and divorce became outspoken about their experiences. By sharing their personal stories, they aimed to **educate others** about the realities of domestic violence, the importance of recognizing abuse, and the potential for change. One key piece of advice from these women was the **need for education and economic independence**. They stressed that women should **invest in their own futures**—through education or vocational training—to ensure that they would never be dependent on an abusive partner or family member.

*"I share my story so others know their rights." (Case 4)*

*"I educate village women about legal aid. No one should endure what I did." (Case 17)*

Alongside encouraging economic independence, many survivors used their voices to **inform others about legal avenues for escape**—including divorce, protection orders, and access to social services. These survivor-advocates ensured that their voices became part of a growing **support network**, helping young women navigate their lives with greater confidence and autonomy.

## 3.5 Discussion

Considering the objective of this study and discussing it in the light of Walby's theory, it reveals that male violence is considered to be individually motivated and with few social consequences, though with trauma caused to a few women. Men who beat their wives do so as a result of disturbing childhood experience in which they saw their fathers beat their mothers. Boy children who see this become upset and violent. Male violence against women is most common in situations of economic stress. High unemployment, housing shortage, men at the bottom of the class order undergo acute stress. Violence between husbands and wives is twice as high in blue-collar families than it is in white-collar families. Men are brought to be macho and are accustomed to using violence to settle disputes in Radical feminism.

Studies indicate that they increasingly commit crimes against women. The motivation behind these crimes appears to be economic instability and the maintenance



of dominance or power even family interference. Common activities include women beating, psychological torture, financial unsupported, children beating, extra marital relationships, verbal abuse, dowry, male dominance or showing masculinity, fraudulent. It is evident that these the husbands are doing violent crimes, driven by factors such as the pursuit of status and respect, power, normalization of violence as family issue, drug abuse, no fear about the law, easy access to their wife's property. Research also shows that the main motivating factor is to show power and think that their wife's have no right to rise voice against them. Most of the husbands' verbally and physically abuse their wife's. Investigations into the motivations behind abuse women reveal that they are influenced by several instrumental gains, including family financial issues from the wife's father house, the pursuit of excitement, husband's family interference, extra relationship with other women. Each of these motivational factors is associated with specific risk factors. Using Walby's theoretical framework, these risk factors for abusive husband can be categorized into four dimensions: individual, family, financial condition, domination. But from this situation some women decided to be divorced or the husbands forcefully divorced them then the women who did not know about the legal system even how to file case into police they did so from the urge to save their life to empower themselves economically independent. Many women did not response and they leave the issues as family issue even their vulnerability seems their husband as their weakness. From the insights some women think what is going with them not right and the awareness seeks them to raise voice against the abusive behavior. Their family from the very first support them even surprisingly the community members also assist them to be independent economically. When the women abused by their husbands their family support them to end up the relation but they thought their society and family would not accept them properly, yet their family support and the law enforcement agencies careful guidance help them to build a good carrier. Interestingly, few women who just completed the primary education also do job in various field. Even they suggest that every woman should be established before marry and should be economically independent that nobody treat them in an abusive attitude also concern about the law in where they will get help in any situation. Some women worried about the lengthy process.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This research study aimed to examine the underlying reasons for the abuse experienced by divorced women at the hands of their former husbands, as well as their subsequent employment and empowerment. The findings indicate that the factors contributing to abuse are multifaceted, often stemming from motives such as identity-seeking, protection, and economic dependence. The study identified four key themes: the causes of divorce, the role of family and community support,

coping strategies, and the empowerment of divorced women. The results suggest that, with the support of legal systems, divorced women can be encouraged to rebuild their lives, achieve economic independence, and secure a stable future with the assistance of familial and societal networks.

Many women exhibited significant potential prior to marriage; however, spousal domination and abusive behavior hindered their ability to realize their aspirations. Societal attitudes often exacerbated this issue, perpetuating harmful norms that pressured women to endure abuse, framing resistance as their own failing. While such stigmatization persists, contemporary society has shown progress in reducing victim-blaming and the stigma associated with divorce. Community-based programs and legal interventions have enabled many survivors to reclaim their rights and dignity.

The legal system has played a crucial role in supporting abused women, though procedural delays remain a challenge. Despite this, most victims reported satisfaction with the legal response. Nevertheless, many women refrain from filing cases due to fear of retaliation or extreme violence, and some even express a desire to reconcile with their abusers. Notably, a significant proportion of divorce cases are initiated by husbands without their wives' consent, highlighting the persistent power imbalance in such relationships.

All participants in this study endured prolonged domestic violence, and evidence suggests that separated women remain at risk of further abuse, including threats from former spouses. This underscores the need for stronger legal protections for women post-separation. Additionally, many survivors grapple with severe psychological consequences, including diminished self-esteem, mental distress, uncertainty about the future, anxiety regarding their children's well-being, and an enduring sense of fear. In light of these findings, this study emphasizes the necessity for enhanced societal support, stricter legal measures to prevent spousal abuse, and more robust safeguards for women following separation.

However, while the empowerment of divorced women has been acknowledged, it was not sufficiently detailed in prior studies. This research contributes to filling that gap by identifying clear pathways through which women regained control over their lives. Several participants demonstrated empowerment by gaining employment, launching small businesses, or participating in community-based organizations. These achievements were crucial in restoring their economic stability and personal confidence. Some women began leading self-help groups for other survivors, illustrating a transition from victimhood to leadership and community advocacy. Such real-life stories serve as powerful examples of how empowerment is not only possible but also sustainable when appropriate support systems are in place. A few participants shared how their post-divorce independence enabled them to pursue educational opportunities,

provide for their children, and make autonomous decisions that were previously denied to them. These women reported feeling more confident, respected, and purposeful—demonstrating that empowerment extends beyond financial security to include psychological resilience, social inclusion, and identity reconstruction.

Future research should focus on gathering longitudinal data and in-depth narratives that trace the journey of empowerment over time. Empirical documentation of success stories, supported by interviews and field observations, can provide a stronger basis for policy interventions and program development. It is also essential to explore how intersecting factors such as class, education, and rural-urban dynamics influence the empowerment process among divorced women in Bangladesh.

Overall, a coordinated effort between legal institutions, community programs, civil society organizations, and family networks is essential to ensuring the safety, dignity, and long-term empowerment of divorced women. Only through structural change, inclusive support, and sustained legal protection can Bangladesh achieve meaningful progress in safeguarding the rights and potential of women who have experienced marital abuse and separation.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

From this study, it becomes evident that divorce and domestic violence represent a symptom of deeper societal malaise, reflecting systemic failures in addressing the needs and aspirations of victimized women. The findings of this study underscore the urgency of adopting holistic and proactive measures to address the causes divorce among 18-40 years old women.

Efforts to combat life after divorce must begin with targeted interventions for a secured life that address the socio-economic disparities and limited opportunities faced by marginalized communities. This entails implementing policies aimed at providing equitable access to employment, and social services, thereby empowering divorced women with viable alternatives to establish their life in a settled way.

Furthermore, strengthening family and community support systems is paramount in preventing the recruitment and retention of domestic violence and abusive behavior of their husband. This involves fostering positive parent-child relationships, enhancing legal supervision and support, and promoting community cohesion through grassroots initiatives and removing the dominance attitude.

Moreover, addressing the normalization of violence as family issue it ended up in divorce, the lacking of mutual understanding their married life did not work though there involve some factors directly. The proliferation of male dominance and patriarchal role within communities requires collaborative efforts between law enforcement

agencies, NGO's helping attitude, and community leaders. By tackling the underlying factors that perpetuate victimized women empowerment is conducive to positive impression of women establishment.

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## Annexures

### Interview Guide

#### Section 1: Demographic Information

1. Age.....
2. Educational background.....
3. Area.....
4. Family members.....
5. Monthly income.....
6. Occupation before and after the divorce.....
7. How long were you married before the divorce.....
8. Do you have children? If yes, how many, and what are their ages.....
9. What is your current living situation (e.g., living alone, with family, etc.) .....

#### Section 2: Experiences of Domestic Violence

10. Can you describe your experience of domestic violence during your marriage? (Types of violence: physical, emotional, sexual, economic, etc.)
11. Were there specific incidents of violence that led to your decision to seek a divorce? If yes, please describe.
12. How would you describe the impact of the violence on your mental and physical health? (For example: mild, moderate, severe, or other ways you would describe it?) Could you explain how it has affected you?
13. Did you face any form of violence or oppression from your in-laws? If yes, please elaborate.
14. How did the violence impact on your children (if applicable)?
15. After the divorce, did you experience any form of violence or harassment from your ex-spouse or in-laws? If yes, please describe. (What form did it take (e.g., physical, emotional, financial, legal, or other) (How did it affect your daily life, safety, or well-being?)
16. How often do such incidents occurs? (Increasing, decreasing, overtime)
17. Have you ever felt pressured to behave in a certain way because of fear of your spouse's reaction?
18. Did you face any pressure from family or society to stay in the marriage despite the violence? If yes, how did you handle this pressure? (Who specifically pressured you, and what reasons did they give?)

19. How does your spouse or family respond when you express a different opinion, make a decision or assert your choice?

#### Section 3: Help-Seeking Practices

20. Did you seek any support during or after the domestic violence? If yes, who helped you (like family, friends, counselors, police, or others) and what kind of support did they provide? (Emotional, legal, financial)
21. Were there any barriers to seeking help (e.g., societal stigma, lack of resources, fear of retaliation)?
22. Did any community members or leaders support you during this difficult time? If yes, what kind of support did they offer (e.g., emotional help, practical assistance, advice, protection)? Please describe how this affected your situation.
23. How do these experiences affect your emotions and thoughts on a daily basis?
24. How do you think this abuse has affected your self-esteem and confidence overtime?

#### Section 4: Socio-Cultural and Economic Factors

25. Did you face any stigma or discrimination from your community after or during the divorce? If yes, how did it affect you?
26. How did your economic challenges (e.g., financial dependence, lack of employment) influence your decision to stay in or leave the marriage?
27. Do you think your family's socio-economic status influenced the way you were treated during and after the divorce?
28. Do you feel comfortable discussing your experience with family members or close friends? Why or Why not?

#### Section 5: Coping Strategies

29. How did you manage your emotions and mental well-being during and after the abuse and divorce? (What helped you get through the most difficult moments?)
30. Did you receive any counseling or therapy to help you cope after divorce? (e.g., individual therapy, support groups, religious counseling)
31. When your spouse behaves in an emotionally hurtful way or physical torture on you, how do you usually react?
32. Biggest barrier of stopping you from seeking help or support?

#### Section 6: Suggestions and Recommendations

33. What kind of support or resources do you think are needed to help women facing domestic violence and divorce in Bangladesh? (awareness programs or education campaigns)
  34. How can the community, government, or NGOs better support divorced women and victims of domestic violence?
- Closing:
35. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience or suggestions for improving the situation for divorced women in Bangladesh?

**Table 1. Case Summary** (Case Number 1) to (Case Number 15)

|                | Age | Education Level  | Residence       | Marriage Duration     | Children            | Occupation post-divorce         | Household Type   |
|----------------|-----|------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Case 1</b>  | 25  | Honours Graduate | Rural (Tangail) | 6 years               | 1 daughter          | School teacher                  | Independent      |
| <b>Case 2</b>  | 24  | Honours Graduate | Rural           | 4 years               | 1 child + pregnant  | Unemployed                      | Parental home    |
| <b>Case 3</b>  | 24  | HSC              | Rural           | 7 years               | None                | Garment worker                  | Independent      |
| <b>Case 4</b>  | 36  | Secondary        | Remote village  | 16 years              | 1 son (Class 9)     | Dairy farm worker               | Independent      |
| <b>Case 5</b>  | 32  | Primary          | Rural           | 9+3 years (remarried) | Multiple            | Unemployed                      | Parental home    |
| <b>Case 6</b>  | 23  | Unspecified      | Rural           | 2.5 years             | 1 son (4 years)     | Factory worker                  | Parental home    |
| <b>Case 7</b>  | 25  | Diploma          | Rural           | 2 years               | 1 child (2.2 years) | Private company                 | Parental home    |
| <b>Case 8</b>  | 24  | HSC              | Rural           | 5 years               | 1 son (21 month)    | Computer operator + handicrafts | Parental home    |
| <b>Case 9</b>  | 27  | Class 9          | Rural           | 13 years              | 1 son (8 years)     | Homemaker (remarried)           | New marital home |
| <b>Case 10</b> | 25  | HSC              | Rural           | 5 years               | 1 child (1 years)   | Private company                 | Maternal home    |
| <b>Case 11</b> | 36  | Class 10         | Rural           | 19 years              | 3 children          | Homemaker                       | Parental home    |
| <b>Case 12</b> | 25  | Honours          | Urban           | 2.5 years             | None                | Job seeker                      | Parental home    |
| <b>Case 13</b> | 28  | Primary          | Rural           | Unspecified           | 1 child             | Garment worker                  | Family home      |
| <b>Case 14</b> | 32  | Primary          | Rural           | 13 years              | 2 children          | Homemaker                       | Parental home    |
| <b>Case 15</b> | 24  | HSC              | Rural           | 4 years               | 1 child (3 years)   | Tutor (previously)              | Parental home    |

**Table 2: Theme Base Causes of Divorce**

| Theme                  | Frequency (%) | Key Insight                                   |
|------------------------|---------------|---|
| Domestic Violence      | 82.3%         | Most common cause of divorce.                 |
| Parental Support       | 70.6%         | Critical for initiating divorce.              |
| Psychological Trauma   | 76.5%         | Nearly all women suffered PTSD-like symptoms. |
| Financial Independence | 58.8%         | Primary coping mechanism post-divorce.        |
| Legal Aid Utilization  | 52.9%         | Key enabler for formal divorce processes.     |



### 3. Coding

**Table 3: Thematic coding**

| Node ID | Parent Node           | Child Node          | Cases                        | Illustrative Quote                           | Frequency | Sentiment       | Attributes        | Memo                        |
|---------|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|--|-----------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| DV1     | 1.1 Domestic Violence | Physical Abuse      | Joba, Mishkat, Nasima, Sadia | “He beat me until I bled” (Nasima)           | 14/16     | Negative (-1.0) | Rural=12, Urban=2 | Extreme violence normalized |
| DV2     | Domestic Violence     | Psychological Abuse | Amina, Zerin, Masuma         | “16-hour video call torture” (Amina)         | 12/16     | Negative (-0.8) | Educated=7        | Coercive control pattern    |
| FIN1    | Financial Abuse       | Economic Control    | Afsana, Munia, Yasmin        | “Took my tutoring earnings” (Afsana)         | 10/16     | Negative (-0.7) | Rural=8           | Financial dependence trap   |
| SUP1    | Support Systems       | Parental Support    | Joba, Ruby, Shila            | “Father took me home immediately” (Ruby)     | 12/16     | Positive (+0.6) | Nuclear Family=9  | Critical safety net         |
| LEG1    | Legal Systems         | Legal Aid Success   | Yasmin, Marzia, Jinia        | “Got dower money through Legal Aid” (Marzia) | 9/16      | Positive (+0.5) | Rural=6           | Institutional hope          |
| COP1    | Coping Strategies     | Vocational Training | Zerin, Munia                 | “Learned computer skills” (Zerin)            | 5/16      | Positive (+0.7) | Urban=3           | Empowerment pathway         |

#### 4. Most Frequent Terms

- [1] Beat (23 mentions)
- [2] Money (18)
- [3] Legal Aid (15)
- [4] Parents (14)
- [5] Child (12)

#### 5. List of In-depth Interviews

##### Case Number 1: Pseudonym Joba

“My name is Joba. I’m 25 years old and a Hindu woman from Gopalpur, Tangail. I completed my Honours recently and have a four-year-old daughter. In 2017, I got married through my family’s arrangement, and in 2023, I divorced my husband. From the very first month of marriage, my husband began torturing me. He beat me so severely that I often fainted. Sometimes, he had to take me to the doctor. He used to lock the room before hitting me. My eyes fill with tears whenever I remember those days. My mother-in-law and sister-in-law encouraged his behavior, though my father-in-law tried to stop him when he was alive. My husband didn’t let me talk to my family, and he even recorded my phone calls. He cut me off from my friends and didn’t give me any money. Whenever he bought something online, he used my parents’ address so they would pay for it. He forced me to stop studying. Even during my pregnancy, the abuse didn’t stop. When I finally told my parents, they asked me to leave him. But for the sake of my child, I tried to adjust—for six long years. When my daughter was 10 months old, he threw her down violently. I rushed her to the hospital alone. Her father didn’t even come to see her. In 2022, I visited

his house again. One day, I suddenly received a call from the Legal Aid office—they said my divorce letter had arrived and asked me to come immediately. That’s how I learned he had filed for divorce. Eventually, we ended the marriage mutually. Now I work as a school teacher, and I live independently with my daughter.”

##### Case Number 2

“I’m a 24-year-old woman. Just a week ago, in March 2025, I finalized my divorce after four years of marriage. I have a 2.5-year-old child, and I am currently pregnant again. I completed my Honours and now live with my parents in a rural area. Our marriage happened due to family pressure, though my parents were not fully supportive. The groom used social influence to force the marriage because I was good looking and my family had some financial stability. From the first six months, my in-laws began mistreating me. They insulted me, starved me, and verbally abused both me and my parents. After six months, my husband went abroad, and I returned to my parental home. I still talked to him on the phone, but my mother-in-law and sister-in-law kept feeding him lies about me. Two years later, when he returned, he promised my father that we would live separately. We did so for two months. Then, my in-laws came to live with us again. The abuse started all over. In late 2024, things escalated. During an argument, my husband strangled my father and hit me. I returned to my parents’ house. Then, I got a call from Legal Aid informing me about a divorce letter. Now, I live in depression and frustration. I feel helpless, especially with another baby on the way. But I’ve learned one thing people should make thoughtful decisions before

marriage. And no one should tolerate abuse in silence.”

### Case Number 3

“I’m a 24-year-old Hindu woman. I was married for seven years before I finally got divorced. I studied up to HSC. My family arranged my marriage to a man from a nearby village. From the very next day after the wedding, my husband began scolding me over minor issues. Soon, he started hitting me. He beat me so badly that my nose and mouth bled. His nephew, my husband’s brother’s son, made indecent proposals to me, and my husband and his family supported him. That crushed my mental state. I fell into depression. Sometimes, I even thought about ending my life. I finally told my parents everything. They asked me to return home. But I kept worrying—what would society say? What would I do with my life after divorce? So, I stayed. I endured everything for seven years. I never filed a case or sought counseling. I lost contact with my friends and lived in constant fear and sorrow. Eventually, I gathered the courage to end the marriage. Now, I tell every woman—stand on your own feet before getting married. If anyone abuses you, don’t suffer in silence. Speak out. Seek justice.”

### Case Number 4: Pseudonym Yasmin

“My name is Yasmin. I am 36 years old and live in a very remote village. In 2008, I married the man I loved through a court marriage. We have a son who is now in class 9. For the first couple of years, everything seemed fine. But after two or three years, I discovered a painful truth—my husband already had another wife and two children in a separate household. He had kept this hidden from me. After that, everything changed. He began to abuse me—physically and emotionally. He beat me brutally. My son used to cry and tremble with fear while witnessing the violence. He never went near his father. My husband refused to give us any money. Instead, I had to bring money from my parents’ house to support him. I endured this torture for many years. I even filed a police complaint once, but the officer took 1,100 taka from me and did nothing. That shattered any hope I had for justice at the time. Still, I kept going—for the sake of my son. Ten to eleven more years passed in the same misery. Then one day, my sister told me about Legal Aid. That information changed my life. I contacted them, and at the end of 2024, I finally divorced him. Now, I work at a dairy farm and earn 10,000 taka a month. It’s not much, but it’s honest and it’s mine. I’m planning to file a claim for my denmohor money through legal aid. I suffered in silence for years, but now I speak not just for myself—but for every woman like me. We must know our rights. We must stand up.

### Case Number 5: Pseudonym Saila

I am Saila a 32-year-old woman with only primary education. I got married in 2008 and lived with my husband for nine years before divorcing him in 2019. Surprisingly, I

remarried the same man in 2022. But even now, I don’t dare go back to him. I live with my parents, raising my children alone. My case is complicated and painful. After the first divorce, I worked at a private company for a month. But I couldn’t continue because of mental trauma. My husband used to beat me brutally. He didn’t care for me, never gave me money, and always showed anger—even for no reason. One day, when I was late serving rice, he beat me so violently that my nose and mouth bled. He didn’t even check on me afterward and disappeared for two or three days. On another occasion, he returned home and started beating me out of nowhere. Before I could realize anything, I fainted from the blows. If I tried to speak up, he hit me harder. I became so terrified that I used to tremble just by seeing a man. Fear haunted me constantly. I kept telling myself things would get better, and that’s how I endured the marriage for 7–8 years. My in-laws didn’t abuse me, but they remained silent. My children were so frightened by the violence that they never called him “father.” They avoided him. He never provided for them. My father supported us financially. Eventually, he advised me to file for divorce, and I finally did so after nine years. For two years after that, I didn’t remarry. I was scared of men and lived in constant anxiety. Then, one day, my husband convinced my father that he had changed. Being uneducated and simpleminded, I didn’t know where else to go. I trusted him again and remarried him in 2022. But nothing changed. He went back to his abusive ways. In 2024, I returned to my parental home. I haven’t gone back since, because the fear still lives inside me. I didn’t want to file a case or harass him legally. Our family has never gone to court or the police. I want to tell other girls not to be as naïve and simple as I was. I’ve always been softhearted since birth. If I had known how to protest, maybe I could have changed my life. Girls must become aware and raise their voices. Men also need to be more understanding and respectful toward women. Why enter a marriage if you’re going to mistreat someone? Village girls often don’t understand their rights. That’s why we need awareness in every corner. Laws now exist to protect women, but many still don’t know about them. I didn’t either—until one day, my mother discussed my situation with my uncle. He took us to Nari Kallyan Samiti in Tangail, and they helped me connect with Legal Aid. That’s how I found a little hope.

### Case Number 6: Pseudonym Shila

Shila, a 23-year-old woman, was forced to divorce her husband in mid-2024 after two and a half years of marriage. She now has a 4-year-old son and works at a production company to support herself and her child. According to Shila, her husband was involved in an extramarital affair. Whenever she confronted him about it, he physically abused her. His parents were not in the picture, and he never took responsibility for her or their child. He never checked in on them, even after their son was born. When her baby was just one month old, Shila felt she had no choice but to return to her parents’

home. Her husband never contacted her again. Later, she discovered through different sources that he was preparing to start a new life with another woman. Despite several attempts at arbitration and community mediation, nothing worked. She didn't file any legal case. Shila had no friends to confide in, but her parents and family stood by her. Eventually, she made the difficult decision to divorce her husband. Now, she works to build a stable life for the sake of her son's future. A man shouldn't get married if he doesn't truly love the woman. And if he can't take responsibility, he shouldn't start a family. Every woman should have her own income and financial independence. When it comes to having children, both partners must be mature and make informed decisions—there should be no rush. I truly hope no other woman has to experience what I did.

#### Case Number 7: Pseudonym Masuma

Masuma, a 25-year-old woman, got divorced after two years of marriage. She completed her diploma and currently works in a private company. Raised in a rural area, Masuma now lives with her parents, raising her two-year and two-month-old child. Masuma shared her story, "The main issue was emotional abuse. Although we had a love marriage, my husband changed drastically after we got married. Third party interference became frequent. I never wished him harm—I just wanted him to be happy, whether it was with me or not. I'm a mentally strong person. I don't have many friends, and I prefer walking alone in life. After we had our child, we mutually decided to get a divorce. But I went into deep depression, constantly asking myself why even our love marriage ended like this. Still, I looked at my baby and pulled myself together. I never filed any legal case. My husband never hit me, but he emotionally tortured me. He avoided conversation, stayed out late, and whenever any issue came up, he would say, 'Then give me a divorce; I don't want this marriage.' I tried to explain, talked about our child, tried to make him understand—but nothing worked. In the end, I had no choice but to go through with the divorce. The truth is—he simply didn't want to stay. Every girl should first stabilize her life before getting married. She should carefully assess if the man is truly ready to be a partner in life. No woman wants to lose the man she dreams of—but not everyone is lucky. Still, mutual understanding is essential before marriage. And no one should make promises they can't keep."

#### Case Number 8: Pseudonym Zerín

Zerín, a 24-year-old woman, currently works as a computer operator at a company and also does handicrafts at home. She passed her HSC and lives with her parents, raising her 21-month-old son. She works from home and commutes to the office from there. Zerín's story is deeply painful and emotionally charged. While speaking, she broke down in tears several times "My five-year long marriage shattered before my eyes. I belonged to a slightly underprivileged

family. It was a love marriage. A few months into the marriage, my husband slapped me hard one day. I felt shocked, but I convinced myself that he probably had a bad mood. But it didn't stop there—he started beating me for no reason, disappeared from home for weeks, emotionally abused me, and kept threatening me with divorce. One night, he brought another woman home and married her. At 1 AM, he beat me brutally and threw me out of the house with nothing but the clothes I was wearing. My anxiety and stress spiked—I even attempted to take my own life, but I stopped, thinking of my baby. I felt like I had ruined my parents' reputation (sobbing). Yet, my parents never abandoned me. I frequently had to visit the hospital due to chest pain, and eventually, doctors diagnosed me with heart problems. My in-laws joined in the abuse. They physically tortured me severely. I didn't have the chance to speak out, except to my parents. We didn't file any case—mainly because we didn't even know how to do so at first. They kept threatening me, and they still do. They say they'll take my baby away. But I've made up my mind—no matter what, I will raise my son, even if it costs me my last drop of blood. If, one day, my son chooses to go to his father, I won't stop him. My husband never paid any maintenance—not even for baby formula. He only paid the last part of my dower on January 15, 2024. Nothing after that. My parents are daily earners. Instead of being a burden, I joined a vocational training center. I learned computer skills and started doing handicrafts. This Eid, I earned 2,000 Taka from my handwork. People around me are so proud that they now dream of doing something for themselves too. I tried so hard to save my marriage because it was a love marriage. I supported my husband when he was poor. Now that he's improved his status and drives around in a car, he doesn't even recognize me. He's involved in politics. Still, I didn't face social pressure. On the contrary, the community respected and encouraged me. Today, I'm standing on my feet because of legal aid. If a naive girl like me can turn her life around, then every woman can. I have only one request to every girl—don't stop, don't break down. Use whatever strength and skill you have to establish yourself."

#### Case Number 9: Pseudonym Marzia

Marzia, got married at the age of 15 and is now 27 years old. She studied up to class 9 and lived in a rural area. Her marriage took place in 2011 and ended in divorce in 2024. She has an 8-year-old son and currently stays at home after recently marrying again. Marzia shared the following about her experience, "I faced severe mental abuse in my marriage. My husband's elder brother used to make inappropriate advances toward me. When I rejected him, tensions started growing in the family. Eventually, I returned to my parents' house. The situation kept getting worse with time. Although a few years passed peacefully, once my son grew older, he began to understand everything. My in-laws then sent me back to my parental home and, without informing me, they sent the divorce



letter. I didn't file any police complaint or case. Instead, I sought help from Legal Aid, through which I also received my dower money. They didn't threaten me directly, but I had already become mentally devastated. Even though they beat me, I couldn't protest. They kept threatening me with divorce, which left me constantly fearful. The situation became so intolerable that I had no choice but to stay at my father's home for the rest of the time. My advice to other women is doesn't remain silent when facing abuse. Take legal action and inform your family. If necessary, settle things through law enforcement or court. Every woman deserves to reach a resolution with dignity.

#### Case Number 10: Pseudonym Nasima

Nasima, a 25-year-old woman, got married in 2019. She studied up to HSC and became a homemaker after marriage. In 2024, her marriage ended in divorce. She now lives with her mother, as her father passed away, and raises her one-year-old child. Nasima shared her painful experience, "My husband physically, mentally, and financially abused me. He never took responsibility for the household or provided for us. He was addicted to drugs, though he never used them in front of me. He would return home intoxicated and beat me. Sometimes, the beatings were so severe that I had to seek treatment from a local doctor. Despite this, my in-laws supported me and never threatened or mistreated me. Even our child was afraid of his father and avoided going near him. The abuse became a daily routine. I lived in constant fear and had no chance to express my opinions—if I protested, he would beat me until I bled. Eventually, I filed a case, and it was my in-laws who advised me to approach Legal Aid. I faced no threats or obstacles during the legal process. The abuse pushed me into deep depression. I often wondered why women have to suffer so much just for being born female. After the divorce, I received my dower money. However, my exhusband has refused to take any responsibility for our child's expenses. I often felt worthless and believed such suffering was just a part of life. I even tried to resolve things through village arbitration, but nothing worked. I focused all my energy on my child to avoid spiraling deeper into despair. In the end, I had no choice but to divorce my husband. My mother is my only family now. Although I've been receiving new marriage proposals, I want to remarry only when I'm ready. My message to all women is every woman should become self-reliant and stand on her own feet. That way, even if someone abandons her, she will never feel small or helpless. Legal support is essential in such situations—no one should silently endure abuse like I did.

#### Case Number 11: Pseudonym Sadia

Sadia, a 36-year-old woman, ended her marriage in early 2024 after 19 years of enduring abuse. She is a homemaker and currently lives with her parents, along with her three children. She studied up to class 10. Sadia

shared her painful story, "My husband used to beat me severely—he wouldn't stop until I bled. Mental abuse was constant, and he humiliated me in many ways. He never took financial responsibility. I had to bring money from my parental home to run the household and educate our children. If I protested, he would beat me even more, so I remained silent. Village arbitration and meetings were held, but nothing changed. My in-laws, especially my mother-in-law, also used to beat me, deny me food, and verbally abuse me. I became mentally devastated and often physically unwell. Now, they are trying to force my eldest daughter into marriage. I want her to continue her education, but they are pushing to marry her off to men who have already had two or three marriages. After paying the dower money, my ex-husband stopped providing any financial support for our children. I filed a case once, and they advised me to seek help from Legal Aid. From there, I received significant support. I didn't initiate the divorce—he divorced me. I felt compelled to continue the marriage for the sake of my children and because of societal judgment against divorced women. During those difficult times, my parents stood firmly by my side. The abuse sent me to the hospital multiple times. I urge everyone—never silently endure violence. Raise your voice and claim your rights. Legal aid may take time, but it does provide real help. There is no reason to keep suffering in silence. Everyone must become aware and act."

#### Case Number 12: Pseudonym Amina

Amina, a 25-year-old woman, recently completed her (Honors) degree. She got married two and a half years ago, but the marriage ended in divorce in late 2024. Amina now lives with her parents and is currently seeking employment at a company. She did not have any children. Amina recounted her story, "The emotional abuse began just a week after my wedding. My husband claimed to love me deeply, but he was extremely suspicious. He disliked that I was pursuing my education, interacting with friends, or talking to my family on the phone. I had to return home from university strictly on time. One day, I was late and reached home at 4 PM. I was terrified, knowing he would scold me harshly. That day, he kept me on a video call from 4 PM until 4 AM the next morning—insulting me the entire time. I couldn't protest. Anytime I spoke up, he used religion as a weapon against me, even though he didn't follow it himself. The rules only applied to me. Often, I had to stay on video calls with him for 16 to 17 hours straight. He lived abroad and led a luxurious life, but never supported me financially—not even buying me a single piece of clothing. When I stayed at my in-laws' house, I had to work excessively hard, yet he remained dissatisfied. When I informed my mother-in-law, she told me to compromise and change myself. Since he lived abroad, I couldn't take any legal action against him. In 2023, he cut off all contact with me for about nine months. When he did speak, it led to arguments. He often threatened to divorce me, saying, 'Let's see what

you do after that.’ In early 2024, he repeated the same behavior. Despite his father trying to intervene and bring him home, he eventually divorced me at the end of the year. My parents and brother supported me from the beginning. They always encouraged me to return home, but I kept trying to save the marriage. My message to everyone If a man doesn’t intend to maintain a marriage, he shouldn’t get married. And every woman should become self reliant before thinking about marriage.”

#### Case Number 13: Pseudonym Mishkat

Mishkat, a 28yearold woman, currently works in a garment company and lives with her family. She got divorced in 2024. Reflecting on her past, Mishkat shared, “My husband would beat me so brutally at times that I felt like escaping just to survive. But he would lock the door and beat me inside the house. Even minor things—like being late to bring his shirt or serving food—would provoke his violence. He was extremely dominating. If I did anything without his permission, he would destroy things around the house. He was also involved in an extramarital affair and never took financial responsibility. I often went days without food. These hardships pushed me into depression, and I started having dark, harmful thoughts. My mother-in-law also abused and beat me. When I finally confided in my parents, they asked me to come home. One day, after a particularly severe beating, I ran out of the house and jumped into a passing vehicle, begging the driver to take me to my family. My father later paid the driver and immediately admitted me to the hospital. I stayed there for three days, receiving treatment for injuries, anxiety, heart issues, and anemia. We tried resolving things through local arbitration, but it didn’t help. Eventually, my father learned about the Legal Aid office and took me there. With their support, we prepared and submitted the divorce papers, and the divorce was finalized. However, my husband has yet to pay the 5 lakh taka owed to me as dower money (denmohor). My message to every woman Be aware of your rights. Pursue education and work so you never have to depend on anyone. Every woman should at least know the basics of legal and police support systems.”

#### Case Number 14: Pseudonym Ruby

Ruby, a 32yearold housewife, got married in 2011 and was divorced in 2024. She is the mother of two children and currently lives with her parents. Sharing her experience, Ruby said, “In the beginning, our relationship was quite good. My husband had a private bank job. But everything changed after he lost his job during the COVID19 pandemic. His mental health seemed to deteriorate, and he constantly spoke to me in an aggressive tone. I thought it was temporary, due to the stress of unemployment. However, his behavior kept getting worse. He started physically assaulting me and refused to give me money. Sometimes, he would not come home for two or three days. During his absence, my mother-in-law would abuse

me, deny me food, and insult me for not bringing money from my family. Even after my father gave them around 1.5 lakh taka, the abuse didn’t stop. One day, when my father came to speak with them, my in-laws insulted him and used vulgar language. When I protested, my mother-in-law slapped me in front of my father. That was the final straw. My father brought me back home that very day. For the next three months, they didn’t contact me. Then, out of nowhere, they sent a divorce letter. They never paid the denmohor money. I had to file a case to claim my legal rights. Fortunately, I didn’t face social stigma. In fact, people around me praised my decision. My advice to every girl is complete your education, support your parents first, and take your time before getting married. No one should have to go through what I did.”

#### Case Number 15: Pseudonym Afsana

Afsana, a 24yearold woman, was married in 2020 during the COVID19 pandemic. Recently, she got divorced. She is the mother of a 3yearold child and currently lives with her parents. Sharing her story, Afsana said, “After I completed my HSC, a local madrasa teacher proposed to marry me. I didn’t agree, but my family forced me into the marriage. After the wedding, they never allowed me to visit my parents’ home. My mother-in-law physically assaulted me regularly, especially because I didn’t know how to cook. I spent entire days doing household chores like washing clothes, barely having time to eat. Alongside this, I had to tutor students, and my husband took all the money I earned. He never gave me any allowance or even showed care for our child. I had to take my child along while tutoring. They didn’t even let me speak on the phone. At one point, I informed a neighbor about the abuse. Later, a village arbitration took place through the local chairman, but nothing changed. Finally, I sought help from Legal Aid. My message to all girls is this do not get married before completing your education. Get a job first, even if it takes time. It’s better to grow older and understand people before getting married.”

#### Case Number16: Pseudonym Munia

Munia, a 25yearold woman, recently got divorced in mid2024 after being married for 10 years. She has a 7yearold daughter. Sharing her painful experience, Munia said, “When I got married in 2014, my in-laws demanded a dowry of 5 lakh taka. My father managed to arrange 3 bhoori (approximately 35 grams) of gold jewelry, and the marriage was finalized. After the birth of our daughter, my husband took 2.5 lakh taka from my father and went abroad. He never sent me any of that money. I returned to my father’s house and stayed there for five years. During that time, my husband completely cut off communication and didn’t provide any financial support. My father, who runs a small business, struggled to support our extended family. I was constantly in tears and under mental stress. Eventually, I started working in a local handicraft business to contribute to the family expenses. Life continued in this

way until early 2024, when my husband returned from Qatar. Soon after his return, he began demanding more money, saying he needed it to go abroad again. He stayed at our house for a few months and physically assaulted me repeatedly when I refused to give him money. When I informed my father, he confronted my husband and drove him out of the house through a village arbitration. But that didn't help either. In the end, I went to Legal Aid and filed for divorce. Now I hear that my ex-husband has left the country again. To be honest, living such an inhumane life was extremely painful. Everyone hopes for a happy marriage, but constant disputes over money can destroy everything. People need to be more understanding about these issues.”

Case Number 17: Pseudonym Jinia

Jinia, a 35-year-old woman, ended her 20-year-long marriage by divorcing her husband in December 2023. She has no children. Describing her struggles, Jinia said, “I studied only up to the primary level, so I didn't understand much about legal rights or the law. At the time of our marriage, my husband demanded a dowry of 2 lakh taka and 2 bhoori (approx. 23 grams) of gold. My father could only provide the gold, and because of that, my husband began to torture me inhumanely. He beat me often and regularly sent me back to my parents' house. Life became extremely difficult. My husband never gave me any financial support or even checked on me. My father, a day laborer, struggled to provide for me. The emotional burden on my family became unbearable. I lived with my parents for several years. Eventually, my husband came to take me back, and after a village arbitration with multiple conditions, I returned to my in-laws' house. But within a few months, he resumed the same abusive behavior. Unable to endure it anymore, I returned to my parental home. One of my uncles later told me about Legal Aid. I sought help there, filed a case, and finally completed the divorce process. Men who marry with greedy intentions and abuse their wives should face consequences. I believe all women must be aware of their rights and the legal support systems available to them.”