



THE ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY SUDANESE YOUNG WOMEN DIVORCED REFUGEES IN CAIRO, EGYPT

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

This research seeks to investigate the challenges encountered by young divorced Sudanese refugees residing in Cairo, Egypt. It also examines the socio-economic backgrounds of these refugee women and the hurdles they face as young single mothers raising children in an environment significantly different from their countries of origin. The methodology employed is qualitative, concentrating on the personal experiences of young Sudanese refugee women who have undergone divorce and are currently living in Cairo. The data is analyzed through content analysis, with findings presented as narrative accounts.

Key findings suggest that the narratives of these divorced young women highlight a range of difficulties they face during and after the divorce process. These difficulties include financial hardships, social obstacles, and the pressure of managing multiple responsibilities on their own. The study concludes that social discrimination, cultural disparities, and bullying act as barriers, in addition to the economic challenges faced by host communities.

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Background

Due to the combination of social stigma, gender discrimination, and displacement, young, divorced refugee women face a unique set of difficulties. These challenges have a significant impact on their social integration, mental health, safety, and financial security. (Chiferaw Gelchu Adol, Dessalegn Wirtu (2024) Gina Crivello and Gillian Mann (2020)). Following a divorce, women may encounter significant financial difficulties, particularly if they were previously reliant on others for financial support or lacked work experience in their home country. In comparison to men, they typically have reduced access to job opportunities and are more prone to working in the informal sector without adequate compensation or legal safeguards (Elizabeth Mullett Arnold L. Stolberg (2002)). The research examines the intricate challenges these women confront, the strategies they employ to cope, and the empowering methods they cultivate in response. The results indicate that women are concurrently managing their identities as divorcees, women, and immigrants (Shadia Daoud Ersa Suliman, Amna Tarig Hassan (2025)). Many women have sought refuge in other countries, particularly Egypt, amid the ongoing civil war in Sudan. Female migrants often face additional challenges compared to their male counterparts. This includes refugee single mothers who bear the responsibility of their households, rendering them particularly vulnerable. Given this emerging and increasingly common situation among Sudanese immigrants, it is essential to investigate the circumstances of these young divorced women striving to survive in a foreign land. The article provides an overview of the primary challenges encountered by young women displaced by conflict, especially those who are divorced or separated from their spouses. In relation to their children, birth families, in-laws, and the communities they inhabit, these individuals face a distinctive combination of vulnerabilities.

They additionally indicate encountering a multitude of intricate challenges that encompass diverse sectors—ranging from economic sustenance to safeguarding, educational attainment, psychological well-being, and interpersonal relationships.

Consequently, the research has selected sixteen women who are divorced, thereby enabling them to articulate their narratives as single mothers within the context of refugee status.

The Methodology

The research purposefully chose a sample of sixteen divorced refugee women living in Cairo. Data was gathered using qualitative methods, particularly through in-depth interviews.

The research examined the following aspects during the in-depth interviews with 16 divorced refugee women in Egypt, a result of the recent conflict in Sudan:

- Socioeconomic background
- Participants' perceptions of the reasons for divorce
- Relationships with former husbands
- Economic support received in the past and present
- Difficulties encountered as divorced refugee women
- Their outlook on the future

The analysis utilized content analysis, in which the results were conveyed through narrative stories based on the discussions held with the sample.

The findings

This section outlines the results obtained from comprehensive interviews conducted with sixteen female refugees who relocated to Cairo as young divorced women along with their families. The narratives illustrate their socio-economic conditions and the difficulties they encounter as young single mothers raising children in an environment that is markedly different from their countries of origin. Additionally, this chapter explores the opportunities available for their survival and their views on the future. The findings are presented through sixteen unique narratives, followed by a discussion of the results.

Story two

I am a 28-year-old divorced refugee. My marriage lasted three years, but it did not have any children. The divorce was primarily due to a lack of stability caused by my husband's dependence on living with his family, which resulted in their ongoing interference in our relationship, along with the emotional dissatisfaction we both felt. Before the divorce, I was financially independent and operated a small confectionery business; however, I am currently unemployed and entirely reliant on my family's support. The difficulties I encounter as a divorced refugee include a limited number of job opportunities in Egypt and a feeling of alienation within the local community. I am considering emigrating abroad and see Egypt as a starting point to achieve this objective and secure a more stable life.

Story three:

I am a 32-year-old divorced refugee married for two years, during which I gave birth to a child who is now of preschool age. My divorce was prompted by my husband's overwhelming jealousy and persistent suspicions, which transformed my life into an intolerable nightmare.

Before the divorce, I depended on my family for financial assistance, but I am now trying to pursue new business opportunities, all of which have regrettably resulted in failure. At present, I am relying on my personal savings to manage my expenses.

I often feel lonely and encounter difficulties related to the preschool setting in Cairo. My goal is to start a new marriage project and create a stable family environment for both myself and my child.

Story four:

I am a 26-year-old divorced refugee. My marriage lasted three years, during which I did not have any children. The divorce was due to a lack of compatibility, frequent disputes, and the imposition of differing opinions, which ultimately resulted in our separation. Throughout my marriage, I relied on my father for financial support, and I continue to do so post-divorce. The challenges I face arise from my inability to fully satisfy my needs due to unemployment, which has increased the burden on my father. I am working towards achieving self-sufficiency and securing a job that will allow me to meet my needs and reduce the pressure on my father.

Story six:

I am a 40-year-old divorced refugee and a mother of four children, each at different educational levels, including university, high school, and elementary school. My marriage lasted for 14 years and concluded due to my ex-husband's wish for polygamy, which I could not accept. Before my divorce, I was a pharmacist in a pharmacy, but I now run my own business that offers me financial stability. In Egypt, foreigners encounter significant hurdles in securing employment, which presented a major challenge for me. Nevertheless, I successfully launched my own business to navigate these obstacles. My current goal is to further develop my business and increase profits to ensure that I can manage the difficult circumstances and adequately support my children.

Story five:

I am a 40-year-old divorced refugee a mother to two daughters in elementary school. My marriage endured for five years, and the divorce stemmed from a lack of compatibility between the spouses. Before the divorce, I was employed as a pharmacist in a government facility; however, I am now in search of a job that suits my family circumstances, as most positions available demand long hours that I cannot manage alongside my household duties. The main obstacles I encounter include the steep costs related to my children's education and the challenge of securing stable employment. I aim to enhance my financial situation and provide a respectable life for both myself and my children.

Story seven:

I am a 27-year-old divorced refugee mother of a preschool-aged child. My marriage lasted for two years, primarily concluding due to a lack of understanding with my husband, along with a perceived absence of appreciation and respect from the family. Throughout the marriage, my family took on the financial responsibilities, a situation that continues to this day. The challenges I have faced include managing my responsibilities independently and increasing the burden on my family. I hope to return to my homeland to achieve my goals and attain stability there.

Story eight:

I am a 26-year-old divorced refugee without children. My marriage lasted a year and a half, and the divorce was prompted by my husband's lack of sexual potency, along with his disrespect and lack of appreciation for both me and my family. Before the divorce, I depended on my family for all my essential needs, but currently, I receive support from my siblings living abroad. The challenges I face include a scarcity of rewarding job opportunities and difficulties in adjusting to Egyptian society. I am looking to travel to the Gulf countries in search of a job opportunity that will grant me financial stability.

Story nine:

I am a 27-year-old divorced refugee and a mother to a preschool-aged daughter. My marriage lasted for two and a half years, with the divorce stemming from a lack of stability and the inability to take responsibility for my child. During my marriage, my husband and brother covered my expenses, but now my brother shoulders the entire burden. The challenges I face are related to achieving stable living conditions and the struggle to find suitable employment, in addition to the difficulty of obtaining my divorce certificate due to the ongoing conflict in Sudan. I hope for Sudan to become a safe and stable nation once more, enabling me to return and fulfill my aspirations for psychological stability.

Story Ten:

I am a 35-year-old divorced refugee and a mother of three children who are currently in middle and primary education. My marriage lasted for ten years and concluded due to polygamy and the absence of equity among the wives. I previously held a position as a secretary in the Ministry of Energy and Mining, and I now depend on my consistent salary. The obstacles I encounter include social discrimination, cultural disparities, and the bullying my children face in their educational setting. I am dedicated to improving my professional skills through training and ongoing education to create a better future for my children, and I aim to prepare for legal immigration to attain stability.

Story eleven:

I am a 30-year-old divorced refugee and a mother of two children who are in primary school. My marriage lasted for eight years and ended due to continuous conflicts and ongoing psychological stress. Before my divorce, I worked as a teacher in a school; however, after seeking refuge, I became unemployed and now depend on support from charitable organizations and family. The main challenges I face include obtaining funds for my children's education and locating job opportunities that match my qualifications. I am actively pursuing a position that will grant me financial stability and allow me to raise my children effectively, with the hope of returning to my teaching career.

Story Twelve:

I am a 25-year-old divorced refugee and a mother to a daughter in kindergarten. My marriage lasted for four years, and the reasons for the divorce were neglect, the husband's inability to assume responsibilities, and a lack of character. Previously, I worked in an administrative office in Sudan, but now I rely on my savings and the support of my sister who lives abroad. The challenges I face include adapting to life in Egypt and searching for employment that meets my basic needs. I aspire to provide a good education for my daughter and achieve financial independence by starting a small business.

Story thirteen:

I am 38 years old, a divorced refugee, and a mother of three children who are currently in secondary and primary education. My marriage lasted for 12 years, and the reason for the divorce was ongoing physical and psychological abuse, along with a lack of awareness. Prior to my divorce, I worked as a seamstress and managed a small workshop, but now I find it challenging to secure stable employment. The difficulties I face are primarily related to meeting basic living requirements, especially given the rising costs of education and living expenses. I aspire to expand my sewing business and provide a decent life for myself and my children.

Story fourteen:

I am a 31-year-old divorced refugee with two children in elementary school. My marriage lasted for six years, and the reasons for the divorce were infidelity and a lack of understanding. Prior to the divorce, I was employed at a private company, but currently, I work irregularly and partially rely on family support. I face challenges related to financial stability and the difficulty of finding consistent employment. I aspire to start a home-based business that will help me generate a steady income and secure a future for my children.

Story fifteen:

I am a 33-year-old divorced refugee with one son who is currently in high school. My marriage lasted for 15 years and ended due to persistent financial difficulties and my husband's failure to assume responsibility. I previously worked in marketing, but I am now struggling to re-enter the workforce due to my present situation. The challenges I encounter include fulfilling my son's educational requirements and managing everyday living costs. I aspire to improve my professional skills through training programs so that I can rejoin the job market and attain financial independence.

Story sixteen:

I am a 29-year-old divorced refugee without children. My marriage lasted only two years, and the reasons for the divorce included differing ambitions, a lack of understanding, and issues related to substance abuse. I previously depended on my employment at a bank in Sudan; however, I currently live in Egypt and rely on the assistance of friends and some savings. The challenges I face include securing a job that corresponds with my banking expertise, as well as experiencing feelings of alienation and instability. I am looking to enhance my skills in finance by enrolling in specialized courses or applying for scholarships abroad to improve my job prospects and achieve financial stability.

Discussion of the results

Globally, divorce is a prevalent occurrence in the marital lives of couples. Consequently, numerous divorced individuals and their

children encounter various social, economic, and health challenges following the dissolution of their marriage. There is a scarcity of information regarding the extent and factors influencing divorce in developing nations, including Sudan (Gizachew Worku Dagneu, Melash Belachew Asresie 1, Gedefaw Abeje Fekadu 1, Yared Mulu Gelaw 2024 PR Amato, LM Boyd 2014)

The findings revealed that the respondents were predominantly very young, aged between 25 to 42 years, with a significant number being under thirty, indicating that they experienced divorce at a young age. Some research suggests that marrying at a young age is linked to a greater probability of divorce, often occurring within the initial years of marriage. For example, one study highlights that 60% of couples who marry between the ages of 20 and 25 ultimately divorce (Arnold L. Stolberg, 2002; Mullett & Stolberg, 2002). Investigating the impact of divorce on young adults is increasingly crucial, as the limited research conducted on this growing issue indicates that parental divorce may contribute to challenges in family formation during young adulthood. Several studies connect the early age of divorce to early marriage. The repercussions of early marriage have emerged as a global concern for young women (Shiferaw Gelchu Adol, Dessalegn Wirtu, 2024). Women indicated several reasons for their divorces, primarily related to experiences of violence and a lack of financial responsibilities. A study conducted by Iman Mahmoud Ibrahim Abdo and Aliaa Siddig Altaieb in 2021 examined the factors leading to divorce in Sudan. The results were largely consistent with the reasons identified by the study's sample, indicating a notable increase in divorce rates in the states due to financial issues, harm, discord, insolvency, lack of support, and abandonment.

The main finding highlights the plight of vulnerable young divorced women who seek refuge with their children. The accounts of these divorced young women reveal a multitude of challenges they face both during and after the divorce process. Divorced young women refugees encounter significant intersecting difficulties across economic, social, legal, and psychological domains, a situation further complicated by their identities as women, refugees, and divorcees.

These vulnerabilities frequently entrap individuals in a cycle of marginalization and insecurity. The study revealed that divorced young women refugees encounter limited Employment Opportunities, and additionally, divorced mothers typically receive no assistance from their former spouses in caring for their children. I experience challenges stemming from my inability to adequately meet my needs due to unemployment, which has intensified the burden on my father. Some women manage to establish their businesses. This outcome is supported by Ömer Takak and Reyhan Atasü Topcuoglu in 2025. The findings suggest that these Syrian women confront intersectional challenges across legal, socio-cultural, and economic domains as a result of their gender and refugee status. The research revealed that young divorced refugees faced numerous social challenges stemming from their need to adapt to a new culture. I frequently experience feelings of loneliness and struggle with the difficulties associated with integrating into Egyptian society. Young divorced refugee women are particularly affected by intergenerational conflict; as some studies have shown, disparities in the rate of cultural adaptation between younger and older generations can lead to considerable family tension. (Aniko and Terry, 2009). 1. Youth are generally more inclined to embrace new cultural norms at a faster pace (for instance, concerning gender roles or independence), which may conflict with the traditional values held by their parents, resulting in a deterioration of communication and parental authority Adaora Isabella Odis (2013)

The findings revealed issues of social discrimination, cultural differences, and the bullying that my children encounter in their educational environment as they adjust to life in Egypt.

Studies have shown that young refugees face considerable social challenges stemming from cultural shifts in their host nation, with these difficulties often exacerbated by trauma and separation from family. Such social issues encompass feelings of loneliness, isolation, identity crises, and discrimination (Nahla Valji, Lee Anne de la Hunt, and Helen Moffett 2003).

Women refugees endure widespread social discrimination that combines gender inequality with the challenges of forced migration, resulting in a "double burden" (Jyotika Saksena Shannon Mcmorrow (2021))

Conclusion

The study revealed three interrelated vulnerable circumstances that impact divorced refugee and young women, thereby intensifying the effects of the refugee experience on this demographic.

Additionally, it faced obstacles in finding suitable job opportunities, especially for those who have worked in diverse sectors in Sudan, as they reported challenges in securing employment that matches their qualifications in Cairo, along with insufficient salary offers. Moreover, the increasing costs of housing and education place additional pressure on divorced women, particularly those who are living alone and supporting their children.

In conclusion, it can be stated that social discrimination, cultural differences, and bullying act as barriers, in addition to the economic challenges faced by host communities...

Recommendations

The intricate characteristics of gendered migration issues necessitate comprehensive solutions. To assist women throughout their migration experiences and thereafter,

Encourage the formation of support groups for female divorced refugees to enhance their empowerment and ensure their safety. Connect these divorced women with both national and international socio-economic organizations.

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