

THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF STIGMA ON DIVORCEES IN SASAK SOCIETY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY IN LOMBOK TENGAH

Muhammad Syarifudin¹, Riska Mutiah¹

¹Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, Indonesia

Email: riskamutiah@uinmataram.ac.id

Abstract

Women who identify as divorcees are frequently marginalized and treated as second-class citizens within society. Preliminary findings from this study reveal that divorcees encounter significant hardships resulting from stigmatization post-divorce. This stigmatization not only leads to social contempt but also exposes divorcees to verbal and even sexual violence from individuals around them. This research employs a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore (1) the manifestations of stigma against divorcees and (2) the social consequences of divorcee stigma within the Sasak community in Kec. Kopang, Kab. Lombok Tengah. The findings indicate that (1) divorcees face stigma from their communities, experiencing social contempt and ridicule due to their status. Additionally, some participants reported instances of sexual harassment, including receiving inappropriate images via chat from several male acquaintances, one of whom was a relative. Catcalling was also identified as a form of harassment. (2) The presence of this stigma has notable social implications by developing mechanisms of social distancing. The divorcees tend to distance themselves from others through two main strategies: reducing social interactions and by developing a resilient mentality towards the stigma, especially for those who must engage with others for professional reasons.

Keywords: *Implication, Stigma, Divorcee and Social Distancing.*

Introduction

The deeply entrenched patriarchal structure in this society results in women identified as divorcees bearing significant social consequences, namely stigma. Divorcees are frequently subjected to various negative labels, such as accusations of being 'homewreckers' and 'seductresses' (Karvistina, 2011). In Indonesian society, the ideal family is established through marriage. The New Order regime played a significant role in stigmatizing women identified as divorcees, perceiving them as deviating from the normative patterns of family and gender ideology and not fitting the 'concept of a mother,' which

is regarded as the ideal type of Indonesian woman. A worse stigma is directed towards women identified as divorcees (*janda cerai*) compared to widows (*janda yang ditinggal mati oleh suami*), who are demeaned as active sexual objects and not belonging to any man or being available (Parker & Creese, 2016). The patriarchal order is highly detrimental to women as it legitimizes male superiority over females. Through this order, social mechanisms operate by marginalizing women, and furthermore, women's existence is reduced merely to that of sexual objects (Mutiah, 2019).

Similarly, in the context of interpreting religious texts in cases of divorce, interpretations—predominantly conducted by men, are likely to favor men and lack sensitivity towards women. Similarly, in the context of interpreting religious texts in cases of divorce, interpretations—predominantly conducted by men—are likely to favor men and lack sensitivity towards women (Yudistiawan, 2019). This aligns with what Amin Abdullah stated, that theological thinking is not separate from the contexts of economic, social, political, and defense interests that have solidified within a particular community. (Nata, 2019). For example, the implication of the hadith narrated by Abu Dawud, which states that a woman who seeks a divorce without justified reasons is forbidden from smelling the fragrance of heaven, places women in a difficult position. Instead of serving as a source of stigma for divorcees, divorce initiated by women, known as *faskh* (Yudistiawan, 2019).

In the context of Sasak society, women identified as divorcees also face stigma in their social positions. This includes not only divorcees or those widowed by their husbands' deaths, as commonly understood, but also women known as *Janda Malaysia* or *jamal* which is a label for women whose husbands have migrated, primarily to Malaysia, for work. This labeling is ironic because those referred to as *jamal* are not actual divorcees. (Azmah, 2021). Simply because they live separately from their

husbands, these wives of migrant workers experience stigma.

Regarding divorcees, various household issues result in a high divorce rate. Data from the Mataram Religious High Court in 2015 indicate that the causes of divorce stem from non-conducive household situations. Factors include unfulfilled responsibilities of the household head, disharmony, unmet economic obligations, interference from third parties, moral crises, jealousy, polygamy, physical and mental violence, and underage marriages (NTB Satu Data, 2019). These issues are similar to those experienced by LN, a woman who filed for divorce. LN frequently faced physical violence, including being hit and punched by her husband during his emotional outbursts, ultimately deciding to divorce after their household had been in conflict since 2015 (Suara NTB, 2017).

In Lombok Tengah, data from the Praya District Court indicates that from January to November 2021, there were 1,374 recorded divorce cases. On average, 8 to 9 couples per day filed for divorce, with women predominantly acting as plaintiffs, resulting in dozens of divorce decisions each month (Rosidi, 2021). Various factors contribute to these divorces, primarily negligence by husbands towards their wives. However, such negligence is neither justified nor regarded as a rational reason by society, leading to the stigmatization of divorced women.

Preliminary findings from this research indicate that divorced women suffer various hardships due to societal stigmatization. They are not only viewed negatively but also subjected to verbal and even sexual violence by those around them. Therefore, this study aims to investigate (1) the nature of stigma against divorced women in the Sasak community in Kecamatan Kopang, Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, and (2) the social implications of this stigma on the Sasak community in Kecamatan Kopang, Kabupaten Lombok Tengah.

The findings will be analyzed using Erving Goffman's theory of stigma, which posits that stigma is an attribute that causes an individual to be classified into a socially discredited category (DeFleur, 1964). Goffman identifies two categories of society: "the normals," referring to those who are not perceived as deviating from societal expectations regarding the issue of stigma, and "the stigmatized," referring to those who bear the stigma. Stigmatized individuals internalize societal perceptions of their so-called 'deficiencies,' leading them to accept others' views and feel that their attributes are 'contaminated,' resulting in feelings of shame. Goffman also identifies two groups that provide support to stigmatized individuals. "The own" refers to those who also suffer from societal stigma, creating a space for mutual moral support and comfort. "The wise" refers to those who have social relationships with stigmatized individuals and treat them as part of

the general population. This group includes partners, parents, children, relatives, or family members who are integral parts of the stigmatized individual's (Goffman, 1963).

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design. Phenomenology aims to understand the perceptions and perspectives of research subjects regarding their experiences. The goal of this study is not to determine what is right or wrong, but to perform a reduction of consciousness from the subjects in understanding a phenomenon, a method known as *verstehen* (Kuswarno, 2009). The phenomenological study is conducted using a gender perspective, aiming to raise awareness about the injustice and subordination faced by women and to foster a desire for change. Constructing reality through women's subjectivities has the potential to reveal a reality different from that of men's perspectives (Handayani & Sugiarti, 2017). This research is conducted in the Kecamatan Kopang, Kabupaten Lombok Tengah, West Nusa Tenggara. This location was chosen based on preliminary data indicating a high divorce rate in Kabupaten Lombok Tengah. The research subjects connected to the researcher reside in Desa Wajageseng, Kecamatan Kopang.

Data for this research is obtained from two sources: primary and secondary data. Primary data is

collected through interviews with divorcees and observations made during these interviews. Secondary data is gathered from interviews with community leaders and a review of documents relevant to the study. The research subjects consist of seven individuals who provide pertinent data and are the focus of the research. These subjects are selected using purposive sampling, a technique that involves choosing participants who can represent the people or groups experiencing the phenomenon under investigation. Specifically, the research subjects include five women who are divorcees and two community leaders who are aware of the stigma faced by divorcees. The criteria for selecting these subjects are intended to ensure that the data collected aligns with the research objectives. As mentioned, there are two main criteria for the research subjects: first, divorcees were intentionally chosen based on previous findings indicating that they face more stigma than divorcees whose partners have died. Second, the community leaders chosen are those who have a particular concern for stigmatized divorcees.

The phenomenological data analysis technique involves several stages: initially describing the overall experience, horizontalization, clustering of meanings, description, and the construction of meaning (Kuswarno, 2009). In the meaning construction stage, Erving Goffman's stigma theory is employed as an analytical tool. This approach aims to

reveal the types of stigma, the processes through which stigma occurs, and the social impacts of stigma experienced by divorcees in Lombok Tengah. Data validation techniques in phenomenology include confirmation from other researchers, especially those studying similar topics, verification by readers of the research text through logical elaboration, rational analysis by addressing questions such as whether the explanation patterns are appropriate and logical, and whether the explanation can be applied to other phenomena. Finally, the researcher organizes data that has specific relevance (Kuswarno, 2009).

Results and Discussion

Access to Research Subjects

The introduction to the research subjects was conducted deliberately. Assistance was sought from several acquaintances of the researcher who were friends with or knew divorcees meeting the predetermined criteria for research subjects. This process was relatively easy, as the field assistants had several friends and neighbors who fit the research subject criteria. However, the first two research subjects who initially agreed to be interviewed by the researcher became unavailable as they got married (with relatively short engagement periods) and moved to live with their husbands. All subjects who agreed to be interviewed were then contacted again by the field assistants to arrange interview times with the researcher.

Scheduling these interviews was challenging, as several agreed-upon meetings between the researcher and the subjects were canceled due to unforeseen work commitments or family events that the subjects had to attend.

Building Relationships with Research Subjects

Relationships with the research subjects were established with the help of field assistants. In the process of identifying research subjects, the field assistants were provided with a general overview of the research. This enabled them to give potential subjects an initial understanding of the researcher and the purpose of the research. This step was crucial for building rapport with the research subjects, especially given the sensitivity and potentially traumatic nature of the research topic. The initial step was to establish connectivity and trust between the researcher and the subjects. Through this process, the researcher did not encounter difficulties in building relationships

with the subjects. The meeting locations also facilitated a friendly atmosphere, as the subjects were given the freedom to choose the venue. Two locations were agreed upon: a café and the home of a field assistant. Introductions and interviews were conducted informally, and from the beginning, the subjects were open with the researcher. This openness stemmed from the fact that once the subjects had agreed to be interviewed, they had prepared themselves to be forthcoming with the researcher.

Identity of Research Subjects

The following is data on the research subjects, selected based on criteria determined through purposive sampling. The research subjects include both primary data (the divorcees) and secondary data sources (community leaders concerned with the issues of gender discrimination). For privacy purposes, the divorcees participants are referred to by pseudonyms, as requested by them.

No.	Name	Educational Background	Research Subject Capacity
1	X1	High School	Divorcee
2	X2	High School	Divorcee
3	X3	High School	Divorcee
4	X4	High School	Divorcee
5	X5	High School	Divorcee
6	Bapak Nur Asri B.	Bachelor Degree	Board Member of Miftahussa'adah Lingkok Godak Kopang Islamic Boarding School Foundation
7	Bapak Zubair Mubarak	Bachelor Degree	Second Vice Chairman of NWDI Lombok Tengah 2020-2021

Table 1. List of Research Subjects

Source: Field Data Processing Results

Characteristics of The Divorcees

The characteristics of the research subjects in this study are specifically tailored for those who serve as primary data sources, namely divorcees. These characteristics need to be elaborated upon as they relate to their capability to represent the subject matter under investigation. Utilizing this method, the characteristics of the research subjects are obtained through an interview process. The characteristics of the research subjects are in the table below.

relatively short, with the longest marriage lasting seven years, as demonstrated by subject X1, who married at the age of 18. The longest marriage duration among the research subjects was five years. All five research subjects expressed that their expectation for marriage was to marry only once in their lifetime. However, when dysfunction occurred within the household, they ultimately chose to divorce their husbands as a means to resolve various issues. As shown in Table 2, the reasons for divorce

No	Name	Age	Length of Marriage	Reason for Marriage	Reason for Divorce
1	X1	Mid-20s	7 years (2015-2022)	Had hopes for marriage as a comfortable place	Physical and psychological domestic violence
2	X2	Early 20s	1 year 4 months (2021-2022)	Wanted to have a serious relationship with a chosen partner	Domestic violence and restriction of wife's mobility without a clear reason
3	X3	Early 30s	5 years (2010-2015)	Wanted to have a serious relationship with a chosen partner	Husband had an affair while the wife was working as a migrant worker and during childbirth. Economic violence (wife's assets were spent to pay off husband's debts).
4	X4	Late 20s	5 years (2017-2022)	Wanted to have a serious relationship with a chosen partner	Psychological abuse caused by interference from the husband's family (in-laws) in household matters.
5	X5	Mid-20s	4 years (2013-2017)	Wanted to have a serious relationship with a chosen partner	Husband had an affair

Table 2. Characteristics of The Divorcees

Source: Field Data Processing Results

All of the research subjects mentioned above entered marriage by their own choice and decision. The strongest reason for establishing a household was the desire to form a serious relationship with their respective partners based on mutual affection. As indicated in the table above, the duration of the marriages among the research subjects was

included domestic violences such as physical abuse, psychological abuse, economic abuse, and infidelity by the husbands. This decision was not made lightly, considering the various future consequences, especially since all research subjects had children. Nevertheless, for the subjects, divorce was deemed a solution to end the unhealthy relationship.

Discussions

The research findings will be analyzed using Erving Goffman's stigma theory. As previously discussed in the theoretical review section, Goffman defines stigma as certain attributes possessed by an individual that cause them to be classified into a discredited social category (Goffman, 1963). Previous research findings indicate that divorcees are stigmatized in society, and this study reinforces those findings. The analysis of the social implications of stigma on divorcees is conducted by categorizing the parties considered ideal in the eyes of society, referred to as "the normals," and the stigmatized individuals, referred to as "the stigmatized." Additionally, identification is made of two groups that provide support to the stigmatized individuals, known as "the own" and "the wise." The study further identifies the responses of the research subjects to this stigma.

The Normals and The Stigmatized

"The normals" refer to those who are perceived as lacking any deficiencies and living in accordance with societal ideals. In this context, "the normals" specifically pertain to individuals in the surrounding environment of the research subjects. According to the research subjects, "the normals" view divorcees as deficient and look down upon them. This tendency to regard divorced women as deficient stems from the doctrine of the ideal family promulgated during the New Order

era (*Orde Baru*). As evidenced, divorcees are seen as contradicting the concept of the "*ibu*" which refers to a wife who takes care of her husband and children within the household, serving as a model for Indonesian women (Parker & Creese, 2016). This ideal concept of the "*ibu*" remains deeply rooted in society to this day.

Divorcees represent "the stigmatized" or those who are stigmatized. As previously elaborated in the earlier chapter, the research subjects often face stigma. For example, subject X1 is frequently the subject of jokes by her friends due to her status as a divorcee. It is a common for her male friends to joke about marrying her and then divorcing the next day. Her female friends also make jokes, saying things like, "we are no match for a divorcee," directed at her. Similarly, subject X2 experiences similar treatment, with people around her mocking her as a "*janda muda*." She even faces condescending remarks questioning why she had to divorce at a young age. Subject X3, who works as a domestic helper in Saudi Arabia, faces accusations that she went there not to work but to find a man. Subject X5, a traveling dress vendor, frequently faces teasing and catcalling from men due to her status as a divorcee.

The status of being a divorcee is often regarded as a form of deficiency in women, implying that they are not complete individuals, unlike the idealized version of women.

However, the research subjects believe that there is nothing wrong with being a divorcee. They consider divorce to be the most realistic option when a marriage is fraught with insurmountable issues. The research subjects assert that they have become more independent, free from suffering, and capable of making their own life decisions.

This perspective contrasts with society's stigmatized view, as revealed by the research subjects. For instance, subject X6 stated that she felt happier after deciding to divorce her unfaithful husband. She chose to sell dresses door-to-door, despite the risk of catcalling, to provide for herself and her child. Similarly, subject X1 explained that her decision to divorce was well thought out, aimed at escaping the cycle of domestic violence inflicted by her husband from the very first day of marriage. Although divorce was not easy for her, and she was denied access to her child afterward, she does not hide her status as a divorcee when meeting new people. For her, life post-divorce is a new chapter where she focuses on rebuilding her life by starting a home service salon and makeup business, and she aspires to continue her education in college. Subject X3 shares a similar experience. For her, deciding to divorce was necessary to end her relationship with an economically abusive husband while she worked as a domestic helper in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, her husband was unfaithful during the birth of their child.

Based on Goffman's categorization, the stigma experienced by divorcees falls under the type known as "blemishes of individual character." This stigma refers to non-physical character flaws, where the attribute of being a divorcee causes women to be discredited. As a social identity that is not outwardly visible, the status of being a divorcee is not easily displayed or recognized by others, especially by those who consider it a private matter. However, when divorcees reveal their status or actual social identity to others, they become subjected to widespread discrediting stigma. This phenomenon is evident in the experiences of the research subjects, as previously described. Not only do they face mockery and condescension, but some have also experienced sexual harassment, such as receiving inappropriate photos from men, including relatives, and facing catcalling.

Implications of Stigma: Social Distancing

As previously elaborated, the stigma experienced by divorcees impacts their resilience in navigating daily life after deciding to divorce. The research subjects respond to the stigma directed at them by developing mechanisms of social distancing. This social distancing mechanism is established in two ways: by limiting social interactions and by developing a resilient mentality towards the stigma:

1. Limiting social interactions

The research subjects establish social distance from those considered outsiders by minimizing their interaction area. They confine their interactions to a small circle consisting of parents, siblings, and close friends who are perceived as supportive. As previously explained, "the wise" for the research subjects refers to their parents who have welcomed them back to live with them after their divorce. The "wise" serve as their primary support system. Additionally, the research subjects build a solidarity network with close friends who share similar experiences, specifically other divorcees, referred to as "the own." This group includes siblings and female friends who provide mutual support and moral encouragement.

2. Developing a Resilient Mentality towards Stigma

Another aspect of social distancing involves cultivating a resilient mentality towards stigma. This approach is adopted by the research subjects who, due to their professions, must interact with many outsiders. For example, subject X1, who runs a home service salon, and subject X5, who sells dresses door-to-door, are both required to engage with the public. This necessity compels them to build mental resilience by reinforcing their self-belief to withstand the views and remarks related to their status as divorcees through an indifferent attitude. Furthermore, both subjects have experienced sexual harassment due to their status as divorcees. Subject X1 has received inappropriate

images via chat applications, not just once or twice, but frequently, with one of the offenders being a distant relative. Similarly, subject X5, who sells dresses from village to village, often faces catcalling. She frequently encounters inappropriate remarks and teasing from men while peddling her goods.

The above factors further underscore the research subjects' need to establish social distancing from outsiders. The subjects recognize that others' perceptions of them have changed from before marriage, after marriage, and following their divorce. However, research findings indicate that divorce is fundamentally a choice made to sever unhealthy marital ties. As previously demonstrated, their reasons for divorce include domestic violence—both physical and economic, interference from other family members in private matters, and infidelity by their husbands. The research subjects believe that they have become more independent, stronger, and capable of making the best decisions for themselves and their children after the divorce. Yet, this perspective is not acknowledged by those who frame their views with stigma towards divorcees.

This aligns with observations from community leaders aware of discrimination against divorcees. It is noted that there is a bias in the perception of divorcees, driven by societal masculine hegemony. This reduces the social space for empathy to develop, leading to a deepening of

stigma rather than fostering mutual concern. It is suspected that the stigma attached to divorcees may be an extension of the broader narrative about how women are perceived in society before marriage, during marriage, and after deciding to divorce.

The Own dan The Wise

As outlined above, the implications of stigma include the development of social distancing mechanisms by divorcees. This results in a shrinking circle of interactions, which fosters solidarity among those who share similar experiences. Goffman categorizes two types of social groups that support stigmatized individuals: "the own" and "the wise." The research subjects who establish solidarity with siblings and close friends, who are also divorcees, are classified as "the own." Four of the research subjects fall into this category, while subject X3 states that she does not have a support system beyond her parents, as she deliberately avoids close relationships with others and prefers to keep her personal experiences private. Subject X1 has one close friend who has been a supporter since she began experiencing marital conflicts. This friend serves as a confidant and source of mutual reinforcement, as they share similar experiences. The friend frequently offers support and reminds X1 to stay strong for her child. Similarly, subject X2 has a close friend who is also a divorcee and has been supportive since their vocational

school days. This friend provided encouragement when X2 decided to end her marriage due to the violence she experienced. Likewise, subject X4 has a "the own" relationship with her sister, who is also a divorcee. Sharing similar experiences, they provide each other with moral support and comfort. This solidarity creates a sense of acceptance as 'normal' individuals.

"The wise" refers to those who maintain a relationship with the divorcees through social structures that treat and accept them in a conventional manner. In this context, the "wise" are the parents of the research subjects. As previously described, after deciding to divorce, the research subjects returned to live with their respective parents. For instance, subject X2's parents supported her decision to divorce because her husband had abused her in front of her mother, witnessed by other family members. This led her parents to reject any attempts at reconciliation from her husband, thus solidifying her decision to divorce. Similarly, subject X4's parents and siblings, who are both "the own" and "the wise," played a crucial role in her support system. X4 noted that her mother was the primary support during her escalating marital conflicts that led to divorce. Both her mother and two siblings had similar experiences; her mother had also been a second wife, and her siblings had divorced, though one has since remarried. The shared experiences and conditions provided X4 with

significant support from her "the wise," enabling her to rebuild her life.

Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from the research on the social implications of stigma on divorcees. Divorcees face stigma from their surroundings, being viewed with contempt and subjected to mockery related to their status. They are often categorized as "the stigmatized," frequently becoming targets of sexist jokes, cynical treatment, and accusations of seeking men when working away from home. Furthermore, some research subjects have experienced sexual harassment, including receiving inappropriate images via chat from male acquaintances, one of whom was a relative. Additionally, they face other forms of harassment, such as catcalling. This stigma leads to the development of social distancing mechanisms among divorcees. They limit their social interactions and developing a resilient mentality towards the stigma, especially when they must interact with others due to work. Their social interactions are confined to a small circle of individuals who serve as their support system.

Bibliography

Azmah, B. (2021, May 5). Jangan Panggil Saya Janda Malaysia (Bagian ke II). *Global FM Lombok*.
<https://globalfmlombok.com/jangan-panggil-saya-janda-malaysia-bagian-ke-ii/>

- DeFleur, M. L. (1964). Stigma: Notes Management of Spoiled Identity by Erving Goffman. *Social Forces*, 43(1), 127–128.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/43.1.127>
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma Notes on The Management of Spoiled Identity* (1st ed., Issue 1). Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Handayani, T., & Sugiarti. (2017). *Konsep dan teknik Penelitian Gender* (3rd ed.). UMM Press.
- Karvistina, L. (2011). Persepsi Masyarakat terhadap Status Janda [Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta]. In *Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta*.
https://eprints.uny.ac.id/21969/1/PERSEPSI_MASYARAKAT_TERHADAP_STATUS_JANDA.pdf
- Kuswarno, E. (2009). *Fenomenologi*. Widya Padjadjaran.
- Mutiah, R. (2019). Sistem Patriarki dan Kekerasan atas Perempuan. *KOMUNITAS*, 10(1), 58–74.
<https://doi.org/10.20414/komunitas.v10i1.1191>
- Nata, A. (2019). *Metodologi Studi Islam*. Raja Grafindo Persada.
- NTB Satu Data. (2019). *Jumlah Perceraian Berdasarkan Faktor Penyebabnya pada Pengadilan Agama Se-wilayah Pengadilan Tinggi Agama Mataram Tahun 2015*.
<https://data.ntbprov.go.id/dataset/jumlah-perceraian-berdasarkan-faktor->

- penyebabnya-pada-pengadilan-agama-se-wilayah-pengadilan
- Parker, L., & Creese, H. (2016). The stigmatisation of widows and divorcees (janda) in Indonesian society. *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 44(128), 1–6.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2015.1111647>
- Rosidi, A. (2021, November 8). Sebulan puluhan Janda lahir di Lombok Tengah. *Antara News*.
<https://mataram.antaranews.com/berita/175401/sebulan-puluhan-janda-lahir-di-lombok-tengah>
- Suara NTB. (2017, July 27). *Alasan Banyak Istri Gugat Cerai Suami*.
<https://www.suarantb.com/alasan-banyak-istri-gugat-cerai-suami/>
- Yudistiawan, R. (2019). Perempuan dalam Pusaran Sistem Perceraian (Pemahaman Konsep tentang Perempuan Berhadapan dengan Hukum). *Artikel Badilag Mahkamah Agung RI*.
<https://badilag.mahkamahagung.go.id/artikel/publikasi/artikel/perempuan-dalam-pusaran-sistem-perceraian-oleh-rahmat-yudistiawan-s-sy-11-1>