



# Stressors and Coping Mechanisms of Divorced Women

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## Abstract

**Background/Aim:** The high divorce rate in Indonesia has an impact on the number of divorced women. In Indonesia, women with divorced status are still stigmatised, whereas the stigma and perception of divorced women in the community are still skewed. The formation of a negative stigma from the community makes women who experience divorce face many problems that can increase stress and make women psychologically disturbed. To overcome the conflict experienced, individuals have a coping mechanism as a way to defend themselves against changes that occur both within themselves and from outside themselves. The purpose of this study was to explore the sources of stress and coping mechanisms for stress in divorced women in Cirebon Regency, West Java, Indonesia.

**Methods:** This research was qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. The research participants amounted to 8 women with a divorce status of less than 2 months who experienced mild and moderate stress in dealing with the new status of divorce in Cirebon Regency. The selection of research participants used a convenience sampling technique. Data collection methods using in-depth interview techniques and administering questionnaires perceived stress scale (PSS) to determine a person's level of psychological stress. Data analysis in this study used the Colaizzi method. This study identified two themes, namely the sources of stress of divorced women and coping mechanisms for stress built in divorced women.

**Results:** Sources of stress included social status, negative stigma from society, the process of raising children without a husband, economic factors, fear of facing life in the future and relationships with ex-husbands and their families. These various stresses did not prevent divorced women from continuing their life process. This was because of the coping mechanisms made by divorced women so that the stress they experience did not harm their lives. These coping mechanisms included self-management, enjoying the process, diverting problems, telling other people about problems, strengthening spirituality and self-reflection.

**Conclusion:** Divorced women struggle with numerous stressors. It is necessary to strengthen positive coping mechanisms and to overcome stigmas and prejudices in society towards divorced women.

**Key words:** Stressor; Coping mechanism; Divorced woman.

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## Introduction

The hope of everyone who undergoes a marriage is basically to have a happy, eternal and harmonious

family. But in the process of its journey, household relationships do not always run smoothly because

marriage brings together two individuals from different backgrounds. This is not an easy thing because these differences often present conflicts. Conflicts can come from outside or from within their households.

Marital conflicts that commonly arise (eg difficulty accepting differences, economic problems, children's problems, feelings of jealousy, division of roles, duties and responsibilities, not in line with the original purpose of marriage and the presence of a third person) trigger continuous and unresolved disputes so that the couple chooses to divorce as the best solution.

According to the Statistics Indonesia report, the number of divorce cases in Indonesia reached 516,334 cases in 2022 (113,643, 102,065 and 85,412 in West, Central and East Java, respectively). This figure increased by 15.31 % compared to 2021 which reached 447,743 cases. The number of divorce cases in the country in 2022 was the highest in the last six years.<sup>1</sup>

West Java province is the province with the highest divorce rate in 2022, Cirebon Regency is the district in West Java with the third highest divorce rate after Indramayu Regency and Garut Regency. In Cirebon Regency, the divorce rate has increased every year.<sup>2</sup>

Divorce is an event that ends a marriage legally, which is not planned and desired by the married couple. The impact of divorce is not only experienced by women, men also experience psychological impacts in dealing with divorce, but in divorced women, the stigma received is much greater than that of men. The stigma built by society against divorced women occurs because there are still assumptions that demean women and elevate the status of men.<sup>3</sup> The results of research by the independent age organisation prove that divorced women feel more loneliness, sadness and even depression than men.<sup>4</sup>

Divorced women are often viewed negatively by some Indonesians. When a woman sues the man for divorce for reasons such as not providing for the family, the woman is often blamed, with society judging that the woman cannot manage finances properly. When in the end women work to help to meet family needs, the community considers that the woman cannot take care of her husband properly. So, if the husband has an affair, the woman is again to blame. The divorcée status

attached to women makes women even ostracised by the community. This happens because there are still some people who think that divorced women are women who cannot take good care of their households.<sup>5</sup>

Psychologically, divorced women will experience sadness, shame, trauma and mental shock, especially due to the factor of infidelity by their husbands, these women will experience a personal crisis in the form of negative emotions, namely anger, disappointment, crying easily, irritability and more closing themselves. Stressors and anxiety that arise can be an obstacle to living life in the future. Anxiety is an emotion and subjective experience of a person. Another definition of anxiety is a condition that makes people uncomfortable and is divided into several levels. So anxiety is related to feelings of uncertainty and helplessness.<sup>6</sup> When feeling anxious, individuals feel uncomfortable or afraid or may have a premonition of impending doom even though they do not understand why these threatening emotions occur. Anxiety is an internal warning device that signals danger to the individual. Anxiety will increase in families when one of their family members experiences a life-threatening illness.<sup>7</sup> To deal with this stressful situation, individuals must adapt to stressors. The stress response is also called coping mechanisms, each individual has a different coping mechanism in dealing with a problem depending on the level of stress, parenting and individual experience managing stressors.

Coping mechanisms are the way individuals manage and deal with situations that cause stress to move forward to achieve life goals. According to Stuart and Sundeen<sup>8</sup> coping mechanisms are classified into:

- Adaptive coping mechanisms. Adaptive coping mechanisms are coping mechanisms that support the functions of integration, growth, learning and achieving goals. The categories are talking to others, solving problems effectively, relaxation techniques, balanced exercise and constructive activities. Adaptive coping mechanisms include talking to others and seeking information about the problems faced, in addition to the effort also praying, doing physical exercise to reduce the tension of the problem, making various alternative actions to reduce the situation and feeling confident that everything will return

to stability, taking lessons from past events or experiences.

- Maladaptive coping mechanism. Maladaptive coping mechanisms are coping mechanisms that inhibit the function of integration, break down growth, reduce autonomy and tend to control the environment and avoidance. Maladaptive coping mechanism behaviours include aggression and withdrawal. Aggression behaviour (attacking) against targets or in the form of objects, goods or people or even themselves. The withdrawal behaviour includes using alcohol and drugs, daydreaming and fantasy, sleeping a lot, crying and switching to other activities.

The purpose of this study was to explore the sources of stress and coping mechanisms for stress of divorced women in Cirebon Regency, West Java, Indonesia.

## Methods

### Design

The research method in this study used a qualitative descriptive method, which is an approach carried out in research that focuses on phenomena that occur or are natural and are carried out by going to the field.<sup>9</sup> The approach used was a case study approach, namely the search for cases or phenomena with data collection involving detailed information sources.<sup>10</sup>

### Population and samples

The selection of participants in this study was carried out by purposive sampling. Initial data collection through in-depth interviews with divorced women who were divorced for less than 2 months in the Cirebon Regency area, a total of 8 participants.

### Instruments and data collection

The data collection method used in-depth interview techniques and administered a perceived stress scale (PSS) questionnaire to determine a person's psychological stress level. Data were analysed by using the Colaizzi method, namely 4 stages: (1) collecting data from interviews in the form of primary and secondary data and making data transcripts by listening repeatedly to the recordings; (2) researchers

read repeatedly the existing data transcripts so that researchers could find significant data meaning and underline important statements of participants; (3) determining categories and grouping into themes; (4) writing reports.<sup>11</sup>

## Results

Based on the results of the interviews conducted, main characteristics of respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Characteristics of respondents

No	Age	Length of divorce	Number of children	Job	Stress level
1	38	1 month, 20 days	3	Factory employee	Mild
2	43	2 month	3	Former migrant worker	Moderate
3	35	1.5 month	2	Online merchant	Moderate
4	39	1 month	4	Household assistant	Moderate
5	45	2 month	2	Self-employed	Moderate
6	31	2 month	1	Self-employed	Mild
7	46	1 month, 25 days	3	Teacher	Mild
8	37	2 month	2	Factory employee	Moderate

It was found that 3 (37.5 %) participants experienced mild stress and 5 (62.5 %) participants experienced moderate stress after being assessed from the perceived stress scale (PSS) questionnaire to determine a person's psychological stress level.

From the thematic results of the participants, two themes were obtained which included: (1) sources of stress of divorced women and (2) coping mechanisms of divorced women against stress.

### Source of stress

Divorced women experienced stress caused by several sources including: (1) social status, (2) negative stigma of society, (3) the process of parenting without the assistance of the husband, (4) economic factors, (5) low self-esteem, (6) fear of facing future life, (7) relationship with ex-husband and his family.

### Social status

After a divorce, individuals will face new challenges in their lives, one of the challenges faced by women after a divorce is a new social status. The divorcée status that women hold

will change their social status in the community, which is a source of stress for divorced women. Participants felt ashamed and inferior to their new status. Three participants said they felt ashamed of their new status so they preferred to stay at home.

The following is the participant's statement:

*... "I have been a divorcée since 2 months ago, I am ashamed of my divorcée status, I feel humiliated, I avoid gatherings and going out unless I have to buy something at the stall, I feel that everyone is talking about me"...(P2)*

*... "Sometimes I still can't believe what happened, on the one hand, I'm relieved to divorce my husband, I've been fighting with him, huufftt... but yes, I'm not ready for the status of a divorcée. Shocked yes, embarrassed, especially Sist. I feel like everyone is blaming me for getting divorced"...(P6)*

From the above statement, it can be concluded that the source of stress that arises in divorced women less than 2 months is social status. Their new status makes them embarrassed to socialise with the community.

### Negative stigma of society

The stigma attached to a divorced or widowed woman is not only associated with her social and economic status but also with her sexuality. Ethnographic research on the marital experiences of men and women shows that divorced women and divorcées bear a much heavier burden of stigma than men.

The following are two participants' statements regarding sources of stress about community stigma:

*... "What do you think about divorcées? You are a college student. I'm ashamed if here the name divorcée is still seen as ugly, I don't feel good hearing the word "divorcée" the impression is of a woman who is not right, an odd woman, a woman who is feared and will seduce their husbands, even though who also wants to divorce, I want to have a family that is harmonious forever, but I'm not strong enough to survive."... (P8)*

*... "I have been able to accept my status because this divorce is my wish so by divorcing I am even free, I am relieved. I'm not strong enough with*

*his behaviour. During this time I worked selling online, while COD I also went around, people thought that this divorce was because of my bad behaviour, they thought that I liked to walk around, so now the mothers around me are labelling me badly. I'm sad, so I'm lazy to go out, lazy to meet people around."... (P3)*

Lyn Parker, professor and one of the lecturers at the University Of Western Australia Stigmatization in her paper entitled "The Stigmatization of Widows and Divorcées (Janda) in Indonesian Society", said that the stigmatisation of divorcées can be analysed from the institution of marriage. The institution stigmatises that ideally a woman should be married, outside of that, it is wrong.<sup>12</sup>

Divorcées are more closely associated with stigma than widows whose husbands died. A dead widow is more respected, especially if she decides not to marry because she is considered to still maintain her honour. Something that is highly valued by Indonesian society. Such labelling ultimately leads to women preferring to stay in bad marriages.<sup>13</sup>

### Parenting without husband's assistance

Having the role of being a single parent will experience changes that can cause problems, which previously only played the role of father or mother after divorce must play multiple roles. The following are the words of two participants:

*... "I'm afraid, I'm afraid I can't raise my children, I have to work, take care of my children too, can I give the best for my children. I'm afraid I won't be able to do my best, I feel sorry for them."... (P1)*

*... "Child custody rights are indeed in me, I'm happy about that, but I'm also confused about how to pay for the children in the future, the father is already separated like this and doesn't necessarily want to give regularly, especially if he has remarried. I am afraid that my income is not sufficient for the needs of the children, especially since they are still young, they still need their father's figure."... (P6)*

One of the psychological well-being of children is determined by family harmony. A harmonious family will be able to carry out its functions and roles in building children's character optimally. However, social reality shows that not all families can condition and maintain a harmonious and comfortable household for children who eventually choose the path of divorce. Concerns

about the child development process are one of the sources of stress for divorced women.

### Economic factors

The status of being a single mother makes divorced women, especially those who do not work, have to think quickly about how to work and be responsible for the needs of their children. In Indonesian society, for average husband when divorced and custody moves to the wife's hands, the obligation to provide for his children also ends.

*... "How will I send my child to school, especially since this teteh is already in high school and wants to go to college, there is a fear that I can't pay for it, especially since I'm just a factory employee, it's enough for a day - just a day, I can save a little - a little, hopefully, the father will want to help the Children's school."... (P8)*

*... "I'm still trying to accept it, but it's still hard, especially for the children's needs, I'm confused. I don't work, do I have to go to Arabia again for the children's future? My salary money from my time in Arabia was spent by my husband on unclear matters. Where will I get my daily needs from?"... (P2)*

This is also supported by research Leung, namely the feeling of anxiety experienced by single-parent mothers (single mothers) is the difficulty of finding work and thinking about the needs of daily life with children and panic thinking about the future of their children. Those who become single mothers, either due to death or divorce, apparently experience problems, especially economic problems.<sup>14</sup>

### Low self-esteem

A person's self-acceptance is related to a positive self-concept, where with a positive self-concept, a person can accept and understand facts that are so different from himself. Self-acceptance is a positive attitude towards oneself, can accept one's situation calmly. In divorced women, it takes time to be able to accept themselves with their new social status and divorced women need time to adapt and accept their current situation.

*... "This is how it feels to be a divorcée, I'm still shocked, I still don't believe in my current status, I failed to get married, I'm still shy to go out and meet with people around me, I'm also ashamed of my friends who work with me, Alhamdulillah,*

*they really support me, but I'm still ashamed."... (P7)*

*... "I'm just inside the house, I'm embarrassed to go out, the children go out if they want to buy something, I'd rather buy something in a far place where people don't know me, I'm embarrassed that I'm already a divorcée. I feel that people look at me differently."... (P5)*

It takes different time for each individual to be able to accept his or her situation, of course, the support of the surrounding environment such as family, children and the surrounding community to support and assist newly divorced women so that they can accept the circumstances that occur and have self-acceptance and increase their self-esteem.

### Fear of facing life ahead

Women when divorced will think about many things far ahead, not only thinking about themselves, but also thinking about the psychology of children, child development, child education and how to raise children without a partner. Here are the participants' statements:

*... "The decision I took is not right, sometimes I still think about how I live with my children in the future without my husband, I am also afraid to get married again, there is a lot of scary news on TV-TV. I feel sorry for my children, but if I raise my children, how will their education be, how will they feel living without their father, afraid of being bullied."... (P6)*

*... "Although economically, God willing, I can send my children to high school, they still need a father figure, I am afraid that their psychology will be disturbed, even now I am still devastated by this incident. I feel sorry for the children, they have started to mature and they have started to have a sense of shame about this incident. I'm afraid of lowering their concentration on learning, worried that I won't be able to control their relationships too."... (P7)*

Single mothers more often feel anxiety and fear about the future after divorce, especially when they have children who have entered school age. It is women who more often feel anxiety and fear in facing the future after divorce.<sup>15</sup> Anxiety is a feeling of tension associated with fear, worry, feelings of guilt, feelings of insecurity and the need for certainty.<sup>16</sup>

### Relationship with ex-husband and his family

Another impact of divorce that is a source of stressors arising from divorce is the breakup of ties and communication between divorced couples, children and families. Divorce does not always end well, in fact, divorce always triggers a conflict between the parties' families. As stated by the participant:

... "Yes, that's what worries me, I had a big fight with my husband before the divorce and until now there has been no communication, we blocked each other's WA numbers, I don't want to start contacting him, I am still irritated and hate him."... (P4)

... "There is no communication yet... Yes, there is, I still keep his number, I don't know how our relationship will go in the future, there are children who still need us parents and I am afraid that the children will be cut off from their father, I am afraid that the children will be neglected, especially if he is married and has another child, how will the future be, but I still hate not wanting to meet first."... (P3)

The divorce between husband and wife does not just happen, some factors cause conflict between husband and wife in the household and when these conflicts cannot be resolved then the couple decides to divorce as a solution after divorce parents should still have a good relationship to be together in the process of raising children, but sometimes divorce has an impact on the relationship with the ex-husband after divorce.

### Coping mechanisms

Coping mechanisms carried out by participants included: (1) self-management, (2) diversion of problems, (3) telling problems to others, (4) strengthening spirituality and (5) self-reflection.

#### Self-management

Stress management is about how an individual acts by involving thinking activities, emotions, plans and how to solve problems. Here are the statements of the participants:

... "Stress, anxiety, irritation, sadness don't need to be asked mbak, I want to go far away to release the burden, but I remember I have children, how are they without me. Now I am still trying to continue to accept more, calm myself, convince myself that this is the best, my children always strengthen me."... (P7)

... "If you say I'm sincere or not with this divorce, I'm still not sincere, but yes, how else, if I stay down like this, how will my children be, I'm trying to continue living life while introspecting myself, maybe this divorce is my fault too, so just try to live a little - a little to be sincere."... (P1)

... "Being viewed negatively by the community because of my divorcée status hurts, yes, I used to dress up and go out to deliver orders and CO and I like to be talked about, but now I don't feel good about going out, but I try to accept maybe it's a form of input for me so that my appearance is improved again, but I still have to work, it's for feeding my children too."... (P3)

... "I am trying to accept my new social status, learning to adapt to being a single parent, I must be optimistic and confident that I can educate my children without my husband."... (P8)

Self-stress management begins with identifying the sources of stress that occur in life. Then the next step is to choose an effective problem-solving strategy. In general, there are two ways, namely: a) change the situation (avoid the source of the problem) and b) change our reaction to the source of stress.

From these 2 ways, if we look at the first way, which is to change the situation, not everything can be changed as we want because sometimes the source of stress comes from outside and is difficult for us to change. The second way to deal with the source of stress is to change our reaction to the source of stress. It is not easy to see the positive value of the bad things we experience. But sometimes, when we try to accept unpleasant situations that cannot be changed, it is the first step to being able to see the positive side of what we experience. From the statements of the three respondents above, one of the coping mechanisms used by divorced women in dealing with their sources of stress is self-management.

#### Problem diversion

From the results of the interview, it was found that the participants said they needed to do several things to be able to divert attention to stress so that they could temporarily forget about the stress that they could then carry out activities better. One participant with mild stress diverted stress by taking care of her favourite flowers in the garden.

... "I like taking care of the flowers, by taking care and watering the flowers, I can forget my stress

*for a while, it's calmer taking care of the flowers so I get distracted."*... (P1)

Then one participant with mild stress diverted by watching a funny Korean drama movie.

*"I watch Korean's Films Mbak, I choose funny ones - funny for entertainment if the movie is sad I will get sad again, so just look for funny ones."*... (P6)

One participant with mild stress said that she relieves stress by cooking.

*"My hobby is cooking, I better divert it by cooking, making cakes. It's good enough to temporarily forget the stress."*... (P7)

Five participants with moderate stress divert stress by keeping themselves busy with online selling activities, exercising, cleaning the house, taking a bath with warm water and hanging out with friends.

*"Instead of being stressed out, I'm getting more and more excited about selling online, posting merchandise and going if someone CODs, it's quite distracted for a while."*... (P3)

*"My hobby is gymnastics with the mothers of this complex, but I am still shy to get together, I do gymnastics alone at home, the important thing is that my emotions and stress come out together with my sweat he..he..he."*... (P8)

*"I divert it, if I get down, I can't do anything. I'm busy working and cleaning the house. The important thing is not to stay daydreaming."*... (P5)

*"Take a warm bath, I give spices and flowers, my mind is also calm."*... (P2)

*"After cleaning up at Bu Kuwu's house, I gathered with my friends at my house, made salad, ate together, Alhamdulillah the arrival of close friends relieved my sad problems."*... (P4)

### Telling problems to others

One way that is often used as a coping mechanism for participants is to share and tell problems with others, some tell it to parents, family and children because their children are adults and some are friends. The following is the participant's statement:

*"I tell my mom to relieve myself. I can't keep it to myself, sometimes I tell my close friends too."*... (P1)

*"To my parents, often to my mother, to be relieved, often calmed by my mother."*... (P3)  
*"To my mother, how yes, I can't keep it to myself, when I tell her it's free. My mom always calms me down and encourages me."*... (P8)

*"Tell my close friend, my bestie. She always listens to me whenever I need her."*... (P4)

*"I always tell my mother, that I need to be calmed down, I need to be advised by my parents. But I also often talk to my children, coincidentally my children are already adults, they can share with me."*... (P7)

*"I go to my cousin when I tell him stories, I'm close to him, he's nice to talk to, he always wins me over and listens to me."*... (P2)

### Strengthening spirituality

When experiencing stress and anxiety after divorce, all participants, both those who experienced mild and moderate stress, took a spiritual approach to overcoming anxiety, by praying a lot, "istighfar", performing worship, believing that Allah would not abandon them and taking lessons from the events that happened to them. The following are the participants' statements:

*"Always praying and praying, asking to be strengthened. Never get tired of asking God."*... (P1)

*"I pray a lot, istighfar, my heart becomes calmer."*... (P3)

*"Humans can only try and pray, yes mbak, with this incident I tried to calm myself by praying, I believe God will not leave me, just ask to be strengthened mbak."*... (P5)

*"After Wudhu, istighfar, I pray, ask Gusti Allah, it makes my heart calm, I just surrender everything to Gusti Allah."*... (P2)

*"Praying, reciting the Quran, praying is all I can do, asking Allah to strengthen me, asking to go through these times with patience and sincerity."*... (P4)

*...“Just take lessons from this incident, nothing lasts forever and we must be prepared for any event, I believe this is the best from Allah.”... (P7)*

### Self-reflection

Self-reflection is a brooding activity to do self-introspection and look back at things that have happened in life, analyse habits, experiences and decisions that have been taken. In the participants, it was found that the self-reflection carried out was by self-introspection, making lessons and life experiences and remaining grateful that God still provided health. The following is the participant's narrative:

*...“contemplating, self-introspection, looking for self-deficiencies, finding how to solve problems so that I don't keep thinking about it.”... (P2)*

*...“trying to introspect myself, what I've done, what my attitude is like, it's not entirely his fault.”... (P1)*

*...“What yes, just a lot of introspection, maybe I haven't been able to be a good wife, maybe a lot of my attitude also makes him uncomfortable, it can calm me down a little bit.”... (P7)*

*...“Self-introspection, making lessons and life experiences to be even stronger. Let me be free.”... (P5)*

## Discussion

In this study, two themes were generated from the results of interviews identified from the research objectives, namely sources of stress and coping mechanisms. The impact of divorce on women will be felt more than on men from before and after legalised divorce.

### Sources of stress

The number of divorces increases in Indonesia every year making divorce cases a common thing. But for victims of divorce, this event has a psychological impact that is not only felt by divorced couples but the impact is also felt by children and families of both parties. Stress can be felt by both women and men but women have a higher risk of stress than men because of hormonal and genetic differences that cause women to experience stress more easily than men.<sup>17</sup>

In divorced women, some stressors have a negative impact and can interfere with the lives of divorced women carrying out their lives after being divorced, from the results of interviews, several sources of stress were found in 8 divorced women who were divorced for less than 2 months and had mild and moderate levels of stress.

The first source of stress is social status, experiencing changes with a new social status after divorce is one source of stress in women, divorced women need time to adapt to accepting the new status. Norms prevailing in society, state that the life of a woman who holds the status of a divorcée greatly affects psychologically due to the views of the community.<sup>18</sup>

Stress in responding to the stigma from society regarding widowhood is also a source of stress for divorced women. Divorcée status in women is often viewed negatively by some people. Although the cause of divorce is the man, society always views divorced women negatively. The divorcée status attached to women, makes women ostracised by society.<sup>19</sup> This happens because there are still some people who think that divorced women are women who cannot maintain their households properly.<sup>4</sup>

The process of raising children without the assistance of a husband is also a source of stress for divorced women, being a single mother, a woman who becomes a single parent requires a very heavy struggle because she has to raise children and meet the needs of family life and burdensome is the assumptions of the surrounding environment that put her as a single parent, it is very influential for the life of a single parent family, especially very influential on child development. The task of a parent, especially a mother, will become heavier if she has to be a single parent.<sup>20</sup>

Economic factors are one of the heaviest sources of stress experienced by divorced women, divorced women will immediately think about how to live and raise children without a husband, including financial matters, ex-husbands usually only provide for children as much as they can and even then, not all ex-husbands are responsible, mostly after the breakup of marriage, husbands lose responsibility in providing for their children. That is why divorced women make economic factors one of the sources of stress. After the divorce process, there will be a decrease in economic



problems for both men and women, according to research conducted in India divorced women will experience a greater economic impact than men.<sup>21</sup>

Divorced women tend to experience low self-esteem or low self-esteem problems, this is due to the negative stigma about divorcee status, divorced women feel embarrassed and need time to be able to accept themselves and failure to maintain a harmonious marriage relationship makes women become low self-esteem which will affect their social life in the future if not handled immediately.<sup>22</sup>

The next source of stress in divorced women is fear of facing life in the future. In divorced women, accustomed to living together with their husbands but when women lose their husbands, there will be a heavy burden of life that becomes their responsibility, so they have a very noble and important position because they will continue and maintain the continuity of the family.<sup>16</sup>

Relationships with ex-husbands and their families become a source of stress for divorced women because every divorced couple certainly has different reasons and goes through different processes before deciding to divorce, couples who divorce well, for example, for reasons of differences in principles and not hurting each other when divorcing, there is no reason not to stay on good terms after divorce. But if the divorce is based on conflict that hurts each other, it will create a source of stress for divorced women to keep in touch with their ex-husband and his family. It takes time for a divorced woman to restart a good relationship with her ex-husband if the divorce is based on a hurtful conflict, but it must be considered again if there are children in the marriage then restarting a good relationship with the ex-husband needs to be a concern.

All respondents in this study, both those with mild and moderate stress, still needed time to be able to re-establish communication with their ex-husband, the divorce that occurred by all participants was triggered by unfavourable conflict. They need time to heal the hurt and disappointment experienced.<sup>23</sup> Divorced married couples who have children need to make efforts so that they can maintain interactional relationships after divorce such as: trying to establish a relationship of friendship both by the husband and the wife in addition to establishing

a relationship of friendship there is also trying to forgive the actions taken by the husband or wife made during the marriage.<sup>3</sup>

### Coping mechanisms

Coping mechanisms are any individual efforts directed at stress management, including direct problem-solving efforts and defence mechanisms used to protect themselves.<sup>24</sup> These efforts are made by individuals both cognitively and behaviourally to deal with a problem they face. From the results of this study, the efforts made by divorced women who were divorced for less than two months with each different level of stress, the coping mechanisms they carried out were self-management, diversion of problems, telling problems to others, strengthening spirituality and self-reflection.

Self-management in this study is a coping mechanism carried out by participants by organising themselves so that problems were faced, not to be avoided. Existing problems were faced and solved such as starting the process of accepting oneself with a new social status, starting to increase their self-esteem by developing their abilities and starting to try to forgive their ex-husband to maintain communication for the children.<sup>25</sup> Andiyani<sup>26</sup> states that problem solving is one of the coping mechanisms commonly applied and is effective coping for divorced women. Problem solving in the study was carried out in ways such as using different strategies to solve problems, participants did so by involving thinking activities, emotions, plans and how to solve problems.

Problem diversion is also one of the efforts to reduce participants' stress, among others, by doing things or activities that can forget for a moment about the stress experienced, namely by channelling into hobbies such as caring for flowers, cooking, watching favourite movies, doing sports, soaking in warm water with aromatherapy, cleaning the house and occupying themselves with activities. Self-diversion is a negative coping mechanism because this coping is temporary and does not focus on solving the problem so it causes difficulties for oneself and inhibits learning functions.<sup>27</sup>

Telling problems experienced to others is a common thing that most participants do with all levels of stress. By telling the problem, participants hope to feel relieved and reduce the

stress experienced. This coping strategy is by the theory of Folkman and Lazarus, which reveals that telling problems to others is part of the coping mechanism of seeking social support.<sup>28</sup>

Spiritual strengthening is also one of the steps to overcome stress for participants. Performing worship, praying, believing that Allah will always help His servants and not worrying so much about the problems faced are examples of steps applied by participants.<sup>15</sup> Always praying for patience with the flexibility to accept the reality that exists in him is included in the prayer and patient coping mechanism, namely surrendering to Allah SWT.<sup>25</sup> Spiritual strengthening affects reducing stress, with individuals surrendering to God, it will make the heart calm and stressors decrease and individuals will be more able to accept the circumstances that befall them when they remember God.<sup>29</sup>

Self-reflection is also a coping strategy of the participants, namely by introspecting themselves, making lessons and life experiences and remaining grateful that God still gives them health. Spirituality has a positive relationship with individual resilience in dealing with stress, spirituality can strengthen mental and calm individual feelings so that they can continue to live life in the future, the belief that God will always be with them in facing trials makes divorced women able to strengthen themselves in the problems experienced.<sup>30</sup>

## Conclusion

Sources of the stress of divorced women were social status, negative stigma of society, the process of parenting without the assistance of the husband, economic factors, low self-esteem, fear of facing future life, relationship with ex-husband and his family, while coping mechanisms of divorced women were self-management, enjoying the process, diversion of problems, telling problems to others, strengthening spirituality and self-reflection. Divorced women struggle with numerous stressors. It is necessary to strengthen positive coping mechanisms and to overcome stigmas and prejudices in society towards divorced women.

## Ethics

The study was approved by the Health Research Ethics Committee Universitas Muhammadiyah Semarang, Indonesia (decision No 467/EA/KEPK-UNIMUS-2023, dated 18 October 2023).

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## Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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## Data access

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable individual request.

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