To the memory of my mother, a divorcee, whose strength and resilience taught me that in a crisis, it is possible for one to draw upon both internal and external positive resources to regain self-confidence.
DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis does not incorporate any data previously submitted to obtain a qualification at any other educational institution. Furthermore, it is the result of my own investigations and, to the best of my knowledge, does not contain any content previously written or published by another person except where due reference is made. I also declare that the ethical principles specified by Swinburne University of Technology’s document on human research and experimentation have been adhered to during the course of this research project.

___________________________
Jessica Lai Cheng Chan-Leong

6 May 2010
ABSTRACT

Singapore, a successful cosmopolitan city-state rooted in a diverse Asian heritage and culture, is witnessing a trend of gradual increase in the number of divorces in its population. Unfortunately, amidst this concern for the causes of divorce, little attention has been given to how divorcees in Singapore cope and adapt to such a stressful life-changing event. Even less attention has been given to whether divorced individuals have been able to make positive adjustments post-divorce and to grow through that experience. This research argues that contrary to conventional wisdom, divorce need not necessarily be “bad” and that post-divorce growth is a distinct possibility. Given that divorce in Singapore has shown a rising trend over the past few decades and that there will still be some broken marriages despite all the best efforts of social measures, counsellors and individuals. The researcher believes it is therefore necessary to explore the concept of a “good” divorce – one that could lead to the possibility of post-traumatic growth.

Indeed, divorce cannot be seen as a single event and an aberration to societal norms. A non-judgemental understanding of the predisposing and precipitating factors of divorce; the indicators of problem marriages; the adjustment process; and finally the post-divorce reconciliation, is necessary in any comprehensive study of divorce in Singapore. While divorce is a personal decision and most divorcees are left alone to contend with its aftermath, it has implications on those around the divorced individuals. Hence, given that divorce has such wide ranging psychological, physical, and societal ramifications, a purely quantitative study of empirical data alone is unlikely to illuminate the understanding of the complex issues thrown up by the dynamic process of divorce.

This research instead employs a dual quantitative-qualitative methodology to examine the multifaceted issues of divorce. The empirical work in this thesis has two aspects: the first involves exploring the divorcees’ perceived reasons for divorce, and
categorising them into predisposing and precipitating factors; and the second ascertains their responses to the divorce and identifies the factors that impact the adjustment process and post-divorce growth. Such investigations were conducted through three distinct yet integrated studies. Study 1 adopted a quantitative method and comprised 136 divorced respondents who completed a self-administered structured questionnaire. Study 2, the main study of the research and a natural and complementary extension of Study 1, employed a qualitative approach. In applying a process of thematic analysis to the narratives from the semi-structured interviews with 19 divorcees, Study 2 was able to determine the underlying themes of their experiences. This thematic analysis, combined with a grounded theory approach and conducted in accordance with the six-phase thematic analysis framework developed by Braun & Clarke (2006), yielded rich and authentic information on personal feelings, thoughts and opinions which could not be had from a quantitative survey alone. Study 3 comprised the narratives of 12 expert counsellors who synthesised their clients’ experiences with moderation and input from their own professional experience.

The research concluded that although divorce is a traumatic experience, divorcees are usually able to adjust and eventually achieve post-divorce growth. From the research findings, it is also evident that further studies should be carried out to determine the early warning signals of a marriage in distress and apply appropriate intervention strategies that could avert the crisis from reaching the triggering point of divorce.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I am deeply appreciative for the continuous unfailing support provided by my sister, secretary and all the staff and counselling graduates of the Executive Counselling & Training Academy.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Divorce, the legal dissolution of a marriage, signifies the re-organisation of an established way of life. To date, research has focused most on the negative effects of divorce and revealed that divorced individuals tend to experience lower levels of well-being compared to those who remain married (Jenks & Christiansen, 2002). Financial hardship, social stigma and the disintegration of the nuclear family are commonly perceived as inevitable products of divorce. Empirical studies also repeatedly reinforce that marital dissolution is associated with social problems and financial hardship (Johnson & Wu, 2002; Kelly, 1989; Kitson & Morgan, 1990; Simons, Johnson, & Lorenz, 1996). Given all this, divorce is usually seen as disruptive and an emotionally draining process (Bursik, 1991) that posts challenging social, economic, physical, psychological and emotional changes (Walters-Chapman, Price & Serovich, 1995). Indeed, Hetherington, Cox & Cox (1982) and Gahler (2006) stated that divorce is one of the most stressful events, with a huge impact on the life situation of those who are going through it. Besides this, divorce also involves a disruption of personal connections: a number of studies have shown that about half of the relationships in the divorcee’s pre-divorce network are lost within two years after divorce (Spicer & Hampe, 1975; Rands, 1988).

Research shows that divorced individuals are more depressed and have a greater risk of health problems and psychiatric disorders than their married counterparts (Amato, 2000). This observation was first documented by Booth & Amato (1991) who reported that divorced and separated individuals have an elevated risk of psychiatric illness, suicide,
alcoholism, physical illness and overall mortality. It has been argued that the central psychological stress for those undergoing a divorce arises from a perception of oneself as being unlovable or a failure as a spouse or parent. Many divorced individuals suffer from “separation distress” that is intense, painful and persistent; and they cling on to the ex-spouse. At a less conscious level, separation distress can be viewed as an infliction of “narcissistic injury” where the loss of the spouse destroys one’s primitive fantasies of “infantile greatness” (Rice, 1977).

Not surprisingly then, the view that divorce is a dysfunctional and abnormal state with catastrophic consequences for the individual is accepted almost universally. However, Ahrons & Rodgers (1987) challenged the notion that divorce inevitably results in psychopathology for those involved. They suggested that divorce can be a normative developmental process that could contribute to growth for those impacted by it. Others have argued that while divorce is a potentially stressful experience, it can in fact herald personal growth, and there is evidence to support this view (Weiss, 1976, 1988). For example, a study by Duffy, Thomas & Trayner (2002) on women reflecting on their lives 10 years after their divorce found that most had assessed their lives positively. Hetherington & Kelly (2002) also conducted research on the impact of divorce on individuals over a span of 40 years and concluded that many women had succeeded in making “life-transforming personal growth”.

On a similar track, while the word “divorce” may conjure up images of negative experiences, Ahrons (1995) has proposed the view that “good divorce” is not an oxymoron, given that most people felt their lives had improved after their divorce. In the same study, Ahrons argued that in a “good divorce” both the adults and children emerge at least as emotionally well-off as they were before the divorce. Thus, he said, in a “good divorce”, a family with children would retain important family functions despite
undergoing dramatic and unsettling changes in structure and size, with the parents continuing to be responsible for the emotional and physical needs of their children as they did before the divorce.

In summary, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that while for most people divorce produces a “serious, if temporary decrement in functioning and a sense of general well-being” (Kressel, 1980), many divorcees experience long-lasting personal growth and make positive transformations. Given the divergence of views on divorce, there is a need to explore the concept of a “good divorce” as well as “bad divorce” in Singapore.

Singapore, like many other countries, has witnessed a gradual increase in the number of divorces in its population. However, little attention has been given to the question of how divorcing individuals in Singapore adapt to such a stressful life event. Even less attention has been paid to the concept of divorced individuals adjusting favourably and making positive personal transformation.

This thesis seeks to fill the existing gap in the analysis of Singaporean divorcees’ post-divorce adjustments by investigating the experiences of divorced individuals and distilling the positive aspects of the adaptation process against the backdrop of multiculturalism and a dual legal system governing divorce. In addition, it seeks to understand how divorced individuals in Singapore adapt and transit into their new post-divorce lives. Although, there have been a few studies on divorce in Singapore (e.g., Quah, 1994; Wong & Kuo, 1983; Foo 2005; Osman, 2004) this is the first major study on divorce since 1979 when the Ministry of Social Affairs conducted a study on the post-divorce adjustments of divorce.

This thesis investigates the factors and process of positive post-divorce adjustment, and the resultant post-traumatic growth. The investigation involved three separate yet integrated parts: a quantitative study on divorcees and two qualitative studies with
divorcees and counselling professionals respectively. The current chapter provides a process-centred definition of divorce, scrutinises divorce trends in Singapore and finally examines possible explanations for the consistent increase in divorce rates in the last few decades. The concept of positive post-divorce adjustments is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Subsequent chapters explain the seven research questions and the research methodology employed for this study (Chapter 3); present the quantitative data collected from 136 respondents in Study 1 (Chapter 4); and provide a discussion of themes and sub-themes of the collated qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with 19 divorcees (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 examines qualitative interview data from semi-structured interviews with 12 counsellors. The final chapter (Chapter 7) draws out the implications of the findings from all the three studies for clinical practice and policy initiatives, and suggests directions for further research. Throughout the thesis, the term “divorcees” is used to denote both male and female divorced persons.

**Divorce Laws in Singapore**

Singapore has a dual legal system to regulate family and marriages: one for the general population and another specifically applicable to Muslims, who represent a significant minority of 13.6% of the resident population. The Women’s Charter, an Act of the Singaporean Parliament passed in 1961, contains the legislation on divorce applicable to the non-Muslim population in Singapore and is administered through the civil courts. The Administration of Muslim Law Act, 1966 administered by the Syariah Court (1966), an Islamic institution, regulates divorce proceedings for Singapore Muslims. Consequently, divorce rates in Singapore are reported and analysed separately for Muslims and non-Muslims.
The Women’s Charter restricts divorce petitions from being filed within three years of the date of marriage. The only exceptions are if the petitioner has suffered exceptional hardship or if the spouse has been exceptionally unreasonable and cruel. However, over the years not many of such exceptional applications have been successful (Foo, 2005). Under the Charter, the court would only grant a divorce if it is satisfied that a marriage has broken down irretrievably on one or more of the following grounds: (a) commission of adultery making further cohabitation intolerable; (b) desertion for a continuous period of at least two years; (c) unreasonable behaviour such as failure to provide financially, verbal abuse, refusal to have sex, habitual lateness in returning home and disallowing the practice of religion; (d) a separation of at least three years with mutual consent; and, (e) living apart for a continuous period of at least four years, without mutual consent. Divorced men are usually responsible for maintaining financial support for their former wives. Both parents usually have equal child visitation rights, although, and depending on the age of the child, custody is usually given to the women.

In contrast, the Islamic divorce laws are quite different from the civil ones under the Women’s Charter (1961). In Islam, the Qur’an is the foundation of all religious law, including laws of marriage and divorce (Denny, 1985). Therefore, rules and procedures regarding marriage and divorce are stipulated in the Qur’an and regulated through the Syariah which is a complete code of Islamic law pertaining to the rights and duties of a Muslim. The Syariah Court administers the Administration of Muslim Law Act, 1966, with the objective of regulating Muslim religious affairs and of advising on matters relating to the Islamic religion in Singapore.

This Court primarily adjudicates disputes pertaining to betrothal, marriage, divorce and judicial separation in which both parties are Muslim. Thus, the Administration of Muslim Law Act provides for the Syariah Court in Singapore to administer the following
types of divorce: *Talak, Ta’lik, Fasakh, and Khulu’* (official website of the Syariah Court, Singapore, 2009). *Talak* is an Arabic word meaning “to release” or “to divorce”; and under the Administration of Muslim Law Act, *talak* means “to untie the matrimonial knot by articulating a word denoting divorce”. Interestingly, under the Syariah Court, divorce through *talak* is the exclusive preserve of the husband who can terminate his marriage without cause by simply uttering the word “*talak*” to his wife. *Ta’lik* has the meaning of a conditional marriage stipulation as declared by the husband in the Marriage Certificate. A *ta’lik* divorce can be determined only by a judge at a hearing before the Syariah Court. A wife seeking divorce on this ground has to prove to the court that her husband had breached the *ta’lik* cited by him at the time of marriage. The Administration of Muslim Law Act also recognises a woman’s right to divorce by *fasakh* (divorce by judicial decree) on far wider grounds that those usually stipulated under *ta’lik* cases (Rahman, 2004). According to the Syariah Court Singapore, a *fasakh* divorce may be granted under any of the circumstances stated in Table 1.1. It is interesting to note that the grounds for Muslim divorce are less onerous than under civil law, and adultery cannot be cited as a ground for divorce.
### Table 1.1

**Grounds for Fasakh Divorce under the Administration of Muslim Law Act**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Grounds</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>1. Neglect or Failure of Provision</td>
<td>The husband has neglected or failed to provide for the wife’s maintenance for a period of three months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Prison Sentence</td>
<td>The husband has been sentenced to imprisonment for a period of three years or more and such sentence has become final.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Failure of Obligations</td>
<td>The husband has failed to perform, without reasonable cause, his marital obligations for a period of one year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Impotence</td>
<td>The husband was impotent at the time of the marriage and continues to be so.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Chronic Disease</td>
<td>The husband is insane or is suffering from some chronic disease the cure of which would be lengthy or impossible and which is such as to make the continuance of the marriage relationship injurious to her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Cruelty</td>
<td>The husband treats the wife with cruelty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Other Grounds</td>
<td>On any other ground which is recognized as valid for the dissolution of marriage by <em>fasakh</em> under the Muslim law.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Source: Syariah Court Singapore Website 2009*

The Administration of the Muslim Law Act also allows a woman to divorce her husband by *khulu’* (divorce by redemption). This involves the wife redeeming herself from the marriage by paying her husband a certain amount of money as assessed by the Court in accordance with the status and means of the parties. A wife who seeks a divorce by redemption does so usually because she is not comfortable with one or more factors relating to her relationship with her husband, such as a concern on the part of both parties as to their inability to comply with the law of Allah; a concern on the wife’s part about her being unable to be obedient to her husband; or a concern on the husband’s part about his having to use force on his wife because she does not listen to him (official website of the Syariah Court, Singapore, 2009).
Divorce Trends among Muslim Marriages in Singapore

Muslim divorce trends have varied over the years. Muslim divorce rates were extremely high during the 1950s, a fact attributed to the ease with which a Muslim could obtain a divorce under the customary and religious law and also to the prevalence of early marriages among the Malay population (Djamour, 1959). In 1957, before the enactment of the Muslim Ordinance (the precursor to the Administration of Muslim Law Act), the institution of the Syariah Court and a counselling service, the Muslim divorce rate stood at a high of 521.5 per 1,000 marriages – more than 50% of all Muslim marriages. Since then, the rate of Muslim divorces has shown a steady decline, hitting a low of 96.4 per 1,000 marriages in 1970. This might be attributable to the intense stepping up of social and community programmes to arrest the once alarming rate of divorce in the Muslim community. However, since 1971, the divorce rate has been showing an upward trend (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1979). According to Zainol (2004) the divorce rates among Muslims in Singapore have risen since the 1970s. In 2003, there were about nine divorces among every 1,000 married Muslims, a ratio three times higher than that of Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) and about five times higher than Jakarta (Indonesia). Djamour (1959) and Jones (1981) hypothesised that certain aspects of Malay social and family structure in Singapore could account for the high divorce rates. These aspects include (a) immaturity of the couple at the time of marriage combined with a tolerant attitude to consider divorce as a natural solution if a marriage did not work out; (b) lack of a close husband-wife bond tradition; (c) flexible arrangements for residence of children after divorce; (d) a tradition of equality of husband and wife in the conjugal union; (e) the important economic role and degree of self-sufficiency of Muslim women; and, (f) the ease of remarriage for divorcees.

A distinguishing feature of Muslim divorces is that Muslim men and women tend to divorce at an earlier age and have a shorter duration of marriage compared to non-
Muslims (Quah, 1999). For example, in the 2006 statistics of Muslim divorces, the largest proportion of divorces (34%) was among couples married for less than five years and 13.9% of divorces involved women below the age of 25 (Department of Statistics, 2006). Zainol & Chai (2004) reported that the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) believed that the divorce rate was high because young Muslim couples were not emotionally or financially ready for marriage. Osman (2004) suggested that this could be the consequence of insufficient socialization into adult and marital roles; and hence a lack of understanding of the fundamental essence of the marital institution in Islam among these young couples.

However, official statistics can seldom, if ever, capture the dynamic processes occurring prior to divorce. In a study comparing Singapore married and divorced Muslim couples, Osman (2004) found that divorced couples had a tendency to start the marriage on very unstable or “rocky” foundations and might not have the skills and temperament to deal with behavioural problems despite being aware of their presence. His study revealed that Muslim divorced husbands tended to have problems with financial debt, violence and alcohol abuse. Many were delinquents “beyond parental control” (BPC) category of offenders. Some also had many pre-marital partners, reflecting an inability to maintain a stable relationship; and this was compounded by other behavioural problems. Correspondingly, Muslim divorced male respondents also tended to have spouses who manifested behavioural problems prior to marriage, including drug abuse, smoking and a history of violence (Osman, 2004).

The high and growing divorce rate among Muslims can also be attributed to the procedural efficiency of Muslim divorces which are a relatively quick and easy process in the Syariah Court (Zainol & Chai, 2004). As noted, under Islamic law, a man who wants a divorce just needs to utter the *talak* to his wife to effect a divorce. In fact, a recent
development, apparently in keeping up with technological advancement, was the sanction by religious authorities to allow a Singapore Muslim man to seek a divorce simply by sending the *talak* via a message to his wife on her mobile phone (Ahmad, 2001). Finally, the pressures of living in a developed country where couples might face more challenges balancing material pursuits with family’s demands and spiritual obligations could further fuel the increasing trend of divorces (Osman, 2004).

Muslim couples who remarry also contribute to the high divorce rate as Muslim remarriages have shown a greater tendency to end in divorce than non-Muslim ones. In 2000, almost 20% of Muslim divorces involved couples both of whom had been divorced at least once before, compared to only 1.5% among non-Muslim divorces (Osman, 2004). In contrast, in Malaysia, the Muslim divorce rate has actually decreased, notwithstanding the less onerous Muslim divorce law. According to Jones (2004), certain factors may have contributed significantly to the decreasing divorce rate in Malaysia namely, (a) the rising marriage age; (b) increasing self-arrangement of marriages; (c) the rising general education level; and, (d) the tightening of divorce procedures.

**Research on Divorce under the Two Different Types of Divorce Laws**

Previous research conducted on divorce in Singapore has been carried out either under the purview of the Women’s Charter, which governs divorces of non-Muslims in Singapore, or under the Administration of Muslim Law Act in the case of Muslims in Singapore. There has been little parallel research to compare the divorce experiences and post-adjustments between Muslims and non-Muslims (Wong & Kuo 1983).

The few studies conducted in Singapore on divorces under Muslim law have only examined the practice of Muslim divorce law and focused on specific themes relating to the Muslim matrimonial court (Rahman, 2004). Without parallel and comparative studies it is difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions between divorces under the Women’s
Charter and the Syariah Court. Even so, it may be helpful to summarise the main
differences between the two systems. One distinct and crucial difference between these
two is that Muslims are permitted as many as four wives at a time. This awareness can
affect the way in which a Muslim married woman relates to her husband and to the other
wives (Strange, 1981). Another significant difference is that while the Women’s Charter
mandates a minimum of three years of marriage before a divorce petition may be
submitted, no such restriction is stipulated by the Administration of Muslim Law Act
(Ibrahim, 1984).

Besides these two features of the Islamic law, two other societal factors are
generally thought to facilitate divorce among Malay Muslims: the divorce procedure under
Islamic law and the structure of Malay society. According to Kuchiba, Tsubouchi, &
Maeda (1979) Malays generally ascribe the high frequency of divorce to the simplicity of
divorce procedures under Islamic law. However, perhaps the key factor could be the
looseness of application of Islamic law than from the nature of the law itself. This is an
important point as Jones (1994) commented that the extremely wide range in divorce rates
among Muslim societies throughout the world is sufficient proof that it is not Islamic law
as such that causes high divorce; but rather, it facilitates divorce in societies which have a
predilection towards divorce.

The understanding and appreciation of the two systems is important to keep in
mind in any comparative study of divorce in Singapore. Given the fundamental
differences in the Muslim and non-Muslim legal systems and the rather dissimilar social
and religious support mechanisms between Malay-Muslims and non-Muslims, divorce
rates need to be reported and analyzed separately.
Comparison of Divorce Rates among Developed Countries

This section presents a comparison of crude rates of divorce in Singapore with selected developed countries, while the next section examines the comparative figures of Singapore with some Asian countries/cities.

Figure 1.1. Comparison of Crude Divorce Rates between Singapore and Selected Developed Western Countries

Figure 1.1 highlights the distinction between the crude divorce rate (number of divorces per 1000 residents) in Singapore, Australia, United States of America, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. These five countries were selected because they have formal statistics of crude divorce rates available from 1996 to 2006. They also share a high level of economic development and stable social and economic systems. Compared to these developed countries, Singapore has the lowest crude rate of divorce.

Among the selected countries, the United States has the highest divorce rate, followed by Australia and the United Kingdom. In the United States about half of all first marriages end in divorce (Booth & Amato, 1991), while in Australia, the divorce rate is about 40% of marriages (McDonald, 1995; Le Bourdais & Marcil-Gratton, 1996). Carmichael & McDonald (1988), attribute the sharp rise in the Australian divorce rate in
the late 1960s and early 1970s to earlier marriages, and higher lifestyle and marital expectations, noting also that these elements are common in many Western societies. In England and Wales, the divorce figure in 2005 stood at 141,750, registering a crude rate of 2.57 (Callan, 2006). For many years, the United Kingdom has had one of the highest crude divorce rates in Europe. (Office of National Statistics, 2004).

Divorce rates in Germany have remained high in recent years with little sign of decline. According to the Global Times (2006), over 200,000 couples divorced in 2005 and every third marriage in Germany wound up in divorce. The German legislature is planning to pass laws making it more difficult to get a divorce as the government is understandably concerned about the social and personal repercussions of such a high divorce rate. Not only does divorce add to the cost of public administration but it is also a very financially expensive undertaking for the men especially. A husband contemplating divorce must be prepared to give his wife half of his income for the rest of his life.

Interestingly, while the United States of America and Australia appear to register a downtrend from 2001 onwards, France continues to witness a steady increase in the crude divorce rate. However, France’s increase in divorce rate at 25% from 1996 to 2005 is lower than that of Singapore at 33.3% over the same period as seen in Figure 1.1. The French Civil Code on divorce (modified in 2005), permits divorce on four different grounds: mutual consent, acceptance, separation of two years and “fault” of one partner. Perhaps the relative ease of getting a divorce may have been a contributory factor in explaining the increase in the French divorce rate over the years. However, some demographers have pointed out that these figures may not adequately represent the actual rates of marriage dissolution in the Western countries. They suggest that the downward divorce trend in some countries may be explained by the reduction in the number of registered marriages in the last decade, and correspondingly an increase in cohabitation
and serial partnership. Cohabitation has become a socially normative arrangement prior to getting married (McDonald, 1995) and this finding was reinforced by Kurtz (2004), who commented that marriage is disappearing throughout the West, with an increasing number of couples choosing cohabitation as an alternative. Goldstein (1999) also agreed that divorce rates show a leveling off, mainly because of increased cohabitation. Although de facto couples are believed to have an even higher rate of relationship separation (Green, 1983; Donovan & Jackson, 1990; Smock & Manning, 1997), these occurrences have not been captured in official statistics.

Although divorce rate statistics have been dropping in some countries in the last decade, there has been considerable debate concerning why the divorce rate in some Western countries such as France has actually continued to be high over the same period and may continue to rise. Demographers have argued that a number of social and legal shifts have influenced how people view marriages and divorces. In the past, divorce was considered to be scandalous with much social stigma attached to it. It appears that the stigma of divorce has been diminishing over the past 20 years and the changes in social attitudes make it more acceptable for people to end unhappy marriages. In particular, countries which have liberalized their divorce laws within the last three decades have generally leaned towards “no fault” divorces. Such legal reforms have no doubt made it easier in many countries for unhappy couples to divorce each other (Carmichael et al., 1997).

**Comparison of Asian Divorce Rates**

Thirty years ago, divorce was not common in most Asian countries. However, in recent years, the pattern of divorce has changed dramatically in many parts of Asia and in some countries, such as Korea, Japan and Taiwan the divorce rate has increased markedly.
Huang (2005) identified six key changing factors that could have influenced the substantial jump in the divorce rates across Asian countries: (a) rapid economic growth and intense focus on career and wealth; (b) better education and greater economic independence of Asian women; (c) loosening of social influence over marriage; (d) less stringent divorce laws; (e) less willingness of contemporary Asians to sacrifice personal desires and ambitions for the family group; and, (f) the rise of marriages based on “romantic love” and gradual decline in arranged marriages, contributing to the “westernization” of Asian attitudes about marriage and divorce.

Figure 1.2 compares the crude divorce rate of Singapore with other Asian countries/cities. These are among the most developed countries in Asia, with stable social and economic structures. Interestingly, all three of the predominantly Chinese societies show an increasing trend in crude divorce rate whereas in Japan the rate is falling. Singapore has the lowest crude divorce rate among the four.

![Crude Divorce Rate of Singapore vs Asian Countries/Cities](image)

*Figure 1.2. Comparison of Crude Divorce Rates between Singapore and Developed Asian Countries/Cities*

Zainol (2004) highlighted that Japan, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong, which are highly-developed Asian economies, all had higher rates of divorce compared to the rest
of Asia. Interestingly, Figure 1.2 shows that from 2004 to 2006, there was a slight drop in the divorce rate in Japan. However, Hogg (2007) commented that with the implementation of new pension laws in 2008, whereby Japanese wives may claim up to half of their husband’s pension once the marriage is over, the number of Japanese women petitioning for divorce is expected to increase dramatically in the coming years.

It has also been reported that the divorce rate has tripled in Taiwan during the last 20 years. The Taiwan government’s Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics (2006) estimated that between 25% and 30% of marriages in Taiwan will end in divorce, and this is more than double the number a decade ago. Taiwan, with a vibrant free market economy and an equally laissez-faire society, now registers the highest divorce rate in Asia as the island’s women are increasingly making personal declarations of independence from unfaithful, uncaring or ungenerous husbands.

Hong Kong has also seen a rise in the number of divorces over the past few decades. The soaring rate of divorce in Hong Kong between 1972 and 2001 registered an increase from 0.13 to 2.41 per 1000 residents (Judiciary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 2004). The official statistics from the Census and Statistics Department in 2002 showed that the number of divorce decrees granted in 1981 was 2,060 but by 2001, this figure had grown to 13,425. This is in spite of Hong Kong’s divorce laws which are as restrictive as those of Singapore, in that no petition for divorce can be filed within three years of marriage, and petitions for divorce can only be granted if at least one of five grounds is met: adultery, desertion, abusive behaviour, two years’ separation with agreement between the parties, or five years’ separation without mutual consent (Jeng & McKenry, 2000).

In recent years, a growing number of families in Hong Kong have been affected by extramarital affairs, especially with the increasing economic integration and social
interactions between Hong Kong and China Mainland (Fan & Lui, 2004). Besides extra-marital affairs, the increase in Hong Kong’s divorce rate has also been attributed to the rising status and financial independence of women, the relaxation of attitudes about marriage and divorce (Lee & Liu, 1997); and cross-border employment; (Irving, 2002, Chan, Fok & Wong, 1997). Extramarital affairs have in recent years been identified as a serious social problem involving both men employed in Hong Kong as well as those engaged in cross-border employment (Young et al., 1995; Chiu & Kwok, 2002). The nature of these problems varies from casual and commercial sex to the establishment of long-term second families in Mainland China (Young & Kwan, 1995). Not surprisingly, because of this male infidelity, approximately 70% of the divorces are initiated by women.

Unlike Hong Kong, the divorce rates in Singapore have been virtually unchanged for the last two decades after a six-fold rise during the 1960s and 1970s. Callan (2006) suggested that cohabitation may also be about to peak following its rise in popularity during the 1980s and 1990s. Although Singapore had the lowest percentage of divorces compared to other Asian countries, the percentage increase of 33.3% was the third highest after Taiwan at 64.7% and Hong Kong at 66.6% between the period 1996 to 2006 (see figure 1.2). As no available statistical reports of China’s crude divorce rates are available from 1996 to 2006, it is difficult to make comparisons with Singapore and the three Asian countries as shown in Figure 1.2. However, with the opening up of mainland China in the late 1970s, its large cities experienced a phenomenal increase in wealth and development. Before China’s economic liberation, the reported divorce rate was virtually zero. Since then, China’s divorce rate has been increasing dramatically especially in major cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, according to figures provided by the China National Department of Statistics (2003).
One possibly crucial contributing factor for the general increase in Asian divorce rates is the simplifying of the legal divorce procedures in some countries, leading to easier and quicker divorces. In recent years the divorce laws in China, Taiwan and Japan have become so lenient that a simple period of separation is sufficient ground to lodge a divorce petition. Even if partners disagree about the divorce, it could still be granted on various other grounds such as bigamy, adultery, domestic violence, severe mental illness or abandonment. However, in contrast, Singapore and Hong Kong still retain the requirement that a couple must be married for at least three years before they can petition for a divorce.

**Impact of Asian Women’s Growing Economic Independence and Increased Level of Education on Divorce Rates**

Wesley (2002), in a paper on “Assessing Women’s Well-Being in Asia” suggested that with expanding education and employment opportunities, the status of women in Asia appears to have changed for the better when compared to their mothers’ generation. Hence, women in the more developed Asian countries are more economically independent and assertive. They now have more available choices including pursuing careers and life ambitions, staying single, and even leaving abusive spouses and opting out of unacceptable relationships. In fact, more than two decades ago, studies on attitudes towards family in Singapore (Ministry of Community Development, 1987; Quah, 1990; Quah, 1998) found that better educated women tended to emphasise companionship (75.1%) and love (54.9%) as the most important reasons for marriage. Women’s gainful employment has substantially elevated their economic, social and sometimes, political resources, and this may be another possible contributory factor for the rise in divorce rates. Schoen, Astone, Rothert, Standish & Kim (2002) reported that women’s employment may destabilize marriage and possibly lead to unsatisfactory marriages because the economic independence
gives women resources when they go out to work, and exposes them to more social contacts and professional networks beyond the home.

Hong (2007) reported that in the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) held in New York, the Singapore Minister of State for Community Development, Youth and Sports revealed that Singapore women in their twenties earned up to 98% of what their male counterparts did. The UN Convention recognised that women in Singapore have both economic and political opportunities comparable to male Singaporeans. In fact, Singapore was ranked sixth out of 175 countries in terms of gender equality at the workplace. Hence, when marriages are unsatisfactory, there are fewer obstacles and disincentives to marital dissolution. Wong & Kuo (1983), in a sociological analysis of divorce, found that the proportion of female petitioners was much higher when the wives were working (62.8%) compared to those who were not working (50%). Correspondingly, Quah (1994) observed the rising trend of divorce among economically-active women, which increased from 46.5% of all divorces in 1957 to 67% in 1990. She also linked the increasing divorce trend in Singapore to the social pressures married women face in work and family life and the slower pace at which men’s attitudes are changing to fit the new realities (Quah, 1999).

Driven by the force of modernization, many economically prosperous Asian societies are moving from communitarianism towards individualism. Traditionally, when an Asian woman marries, the union is not only between two individuals, but it also involves the extended families on both sides. Therefore, with growing individualism – speeded up by urbanization and globalization – Asian women increasingly feel empowered to challenge the familial demands of serving the extended family and putting up with unfair treatment such as their husbands’ extramarital affairs and abuse by in-laws (Shon & Ja, 1982). Given this phenomenon and changing marital roles, the traditional marital
balance of power is being profoundly altered. Thus, working wives now have the enhanced leverage of expecting the man to contribute in other ways to family life besides just providing financial support.

Huang (2005) observed that with modernization and the growing individualism, Asian women are less willing to sacrifice personal desires and ambitions for the family group. To modern Asian women, love, happiness, and self-fulfilment take priority over marriage. However, while most women these days might not hesitate to walk away from a loveless marriage, they would do so only after much deliberation and would almost always agonise over the painful decision. Divorce, even in this modern Asian age, is still a traumatic experience for most women and men. The fundamental difference is that Asian women now are more willing and able to make the decision to divorce their husbands. Obviously, these subtle shifts in the marital relationship brought about by economic and societal changes have contributed to the increase in divorce rates in Asia (Sayer & Bianchi, 2000).

Industrialisation and Changing Societal Values in Asia

Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong are three of the few countries/cities in the world which experienced high rates of economic growth along with comparatively low divorce rates in the last decade and up to 2007. However, the divorce rates in these countries have been rising rapidly since 1970. In contrast to Western societies that have experienced an unprecedented increase in the rate of divorce with the advent of rapid economic growth, the variation in the divorce rates of these three predominantly Chinese societies has not been as drastic. The trend of rising divorce rates in many contemporary societies has most often been attributed to the socio-economic changes accompanying industrialisation, and to basic changes in social, cultural and religious values (Wong &
Kuo, 1983). For example, the increase in Hong Kong’s divorce rate has been attributed to the rising status and financial independence of women, a weakening of traditional beliefs, a developing sense of individualism, and changing attitudes about marriage and divorce (Irving, 2002; Chan, Fok & Wong, 1997). Much of the increase in divorce rates during the decade has been attributed to women’s increased social and economic status relative to men (Seccombe & Lee, 1987; Spitze & South, 1985; Trent & South, 1989). From an exchange perspective, women with greater resources have less to lose by leaving a marriage. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as the “independence effect” (Rose & Sawhill, 1975).

Research suggests that the status of women is represented by a multidimensional cluster of variables, including political influence, legal status, education, economic participation, and power in the family (Curtin, 1982; Ruth, 1985; Schmitroth, 1991; UN, 1975, 1991; UNDP, 1993). The analysis focuses on four major variables – education, economic, legal status and political influence – to evaluate the status of women in Singapore and Hong Kong and to determine the relationship between changes in women’s status and divorce. Any discussion of women’s status and divorce in Singapore and Hong Kong must take heed of the more restrictive divorce legislation and policies of Singapore and Hong Kong. Couples in Hong Kong have increasingly been exposed to romantic Western ideals and show wider acceptance of the idea that marriage should be love-based, egalitarian, exclusive and lasting (Lee, 1998; Whitehead, 1997). The active influence of such Western romantic notions was evident throughout the latter half of the 20th century. Findings consistently indicate that love-based lasting marriages were expected by both sexes (Family Planning Association of Hong Kong, 1983 & 1986; Boys & Girls Association, 1996). Bengston (2001) also suggested that the shift from the multigenerational, extended family to a nuclear organisation and the liberating effects of
economic growth were possible reasons for the increasing divorce rates. Kitson & Holmes (1992) explained that with the loss of the extended family, marital partners would need to rely overwhelmingly on one another for emotional support. However, these needs are not easily met because of the demands of work and career; and when unmet, they may give rise to strong feelings of resentment, anger and disappointment.

Research has shown that in Hong Kong, expectations of marriage as a source of happiness and personal fulfilment are increasing (Law Reform Commission of Hong Kong, 1992). It is reasonable to assume that most of the dissolutions of contemporary marriages occur not only because of the greater acceptance of divorce but because of the greater expectation that a marriage should be fulfilling, not just functional. Hence, while better education has given women more options than to remain in unhappy and unfulfilling marriages (Irving, 2002), companionate marriages based on romantic attraction and equity in role sharing has increasingly become the raison d’être of matrimony (Young, 1995). Conversely, traditional values and the need for the financial support that kept marriages together are eroding, with the rising emergence of new expectations of communication, care, emotional support and individualism (Wong & Chan, 1997).

Singapore, like Hong Kong, is undergoing rapid social and economic transitions and transformations. Traditional and stable social and cultural values are fast being replaced by a new set of modern values through universal education, globalization and the mass media. These values find acceptance with a greater number of people under the leveling effects of a mass culture. With the decline of moral and religious sanctions, brought about by the break-up of the extended family, individuals are no longer subject to the same degree of social pressure to maintain a marital union which they find personally unsatisfactory. The literature review conducted has identified several factors that have contributed to the increased divorce rates in Singapore. These include: industrialisation
the growing economic independence of women (Hong, 2007); the financial and emotional unpreparedness of young Muslim couples (Zainol & Chai, 2004); and the changing societal values (Wong & Chan, 1997).

According to Straughan (2008) also noted that Singaporeans’ views on marriage and divorce have evolved through the years. The stigma associated with divorce is fast fading; and marriage, traditionally an institution for social stability, has become a vehicle to bring happiness to the individuals. With these higher expectations, those trapped in a loveless marriage are more likely to seek an exit as more couples place a much greater emphasis on marital happiness now than in the past (Huang, 2005). In this, the Singapore couples’ marital expectations appear to be following a similar trend as that in Hong Kong as noted in the previous paragraph.

While it is useful to understand the reasons underlying the divorce trends in Singapore, there are a few explanatory concepts and principles that connect the demographic, social and psychological variables relating to the divorce process in a systematic and meaningful way. Some possible explanations for the trends come from research in Western countries and an analysis of local trends. Yet caution needs to be exercised when applying Western theories in an Asian context, given the backdrop of differences in cultural values, legal systems, the physical environment and public policies (Jeng & McKenry, 2000). Jeng and McKenry further commented on how the rising influence of individualism and the Western notion of “romantic love” among Asians in contemporary society have contributed to increase in the number of couples seeking divorce as a solution to unhappy marriages. There is a stronger belief in the emotional value of marriage, which more readily predisposes unhappily married spouses to resort to divorce in order to seek more suitable relationships and happier lives (Stewart & Brentano, 2006).
While industrialisation may have given rise to the predominance of a modern conjugal family system, according to Goldner (2004), this system is also the result of the liberalisation of social and economic constraints on the traditional family system and the intense emotionality of the couple relationship which makes it more vulnerable to marital conflicts and hence divorce. Wong & Kuo (1983) observed that the family as a social unit in Singapore has lost much of its previous economic, religious, recreational and protective functionalities for the individual, with such functions having largely been taken over by external agencies such as schools, formal associations, the workplace, and recreational and religious organisations. In addition, the social stigma which used to be attached to a divorced person has been disappearing in Singapore (Wong & Kuo, 1983).

Advances in technology may have played a part in the increased divorce rates, allowing the individual more readily and easily available access as well as convenient opportunities to “stray”. Baker (2005) citing Hudson, the president of the Australian Association of Relationship Counsellors, highlighted that there has been a significant rise in the number of couples separating as a result of cyber infidelity. While virtual affairs in themselves might not involve physical contact, a growing body of research suggests that partners are taking them just as seriously.

Singapore Divorce Trends

A survey conducted by Pereira (2002) on World Values, showed that most Singaporeans strongly value family and marriage as established institutions and regard family life as “very important”. Quah (1999), however, noted that there could be a gap between the ideal and reality, given Singapore’s rising divorce rates over the past two decades, with one in 10 civil marriages registered in 1996 breaking up before their tenth anniversary, an increase of 3% over to the 1987 cohort. For Muslim marriages, 18% of
the 1996 cohort were divorced within their first 10 years compared to 11% of the 1987 cohort.

Compared to most other Asian societies, the incidence of inter-ethnic marriages is relatively higher in Singapore given its cosmopolitan population mix. According to the Statistics on Marriage & Divorces (Department of Statistics, 2006), in the last decade there was an increase of inter-ethic marriages from 1,406 in 1996 to 2,445 in 2006. However, during the same period, inter-ethnic couples also registered the highest percentage of divorce within the first five years of marriage and the lowest number of marriages lasting 30 years or more. Possible explanations for this trend may be the higher marital stress experienced as a result of divergent backgrounds (Chan, 2008); greater and more acute differences in religious philosophy applied in the upbringing of children (Chan, 2008); or language and cultural barriers. On the other hand, it has been noted that homogeneous marriages have a higher likelihood of success because of the greater likelihood of consensus between the spouses on their basic life goals, priorities and expectations of marital roles (Bumpass & Sweet, 1972).

Wong & Kuo (1983) found that amongst inter-ethnic couples, the majority of the petitioners for divorce were women. In contrast, among Indian petitioners in Singapore men formed the majority (61.8% by men, 38.2% by women). Wong and Kuo postulated that this may be due to the conservative nature of the Indian community, given the practice of arranged marriages and the strong social stigma of divorce, especially for women. Conversely ethnic Indian wives in inter-ethnic marriages were the more likely party to initiate a divorce (72.4% by women, 27.6% by men). This was explained on the basis that women who marry outside of their ethnic group tend to be less conservative.

According to the Statistics on Marriages and Divorces (2006), the total number of marital dissolutions in Singapore rose from 4,456 cases in 1996 to 6,649 cases in 2006, an
increase of 49% (see Figure 1.3). The crude rate of divorce also showed an increase of 62% from less than 1.21 cases per 1,000 residents in 1996 to 1.96 cases in 2006.

*Figure 1.3. Total Divorces in Singapore: 1996-2006. (Source: Department of Statistics, Singapore, 2006)*

The rising trend for both the Muslim and non-Muslim divorce rate is obvious. What is not obvious is that the actual rate of marriage dissolution is higher because of desertion and separation. As seen in Figure 1.3, 2002 saw a sharp increase of 14.5% in the number of divorces, rising from 4,838 in 2001 to 5,538 within just a year. This jump could have been brought about by the changes in the income criteria for those eligible for legal aid on 1st April 2002 (Legal Aid & Advice Act, 2001). While no statistics are available on the number of individuals who obtained divorce through the use of free legal services, it has been observed that the more lenient income criteria could have had an impact on those who wanted a divorce earlier but could not afford the costs of legal services (Chan, 2008).

It is also noteworthy that among the different age groups, younger couples were the ones most likely to break up, consistently registering the highest divorce rate. According to
the Singapore Department of Statistics (2007) men and women in the age group of 30 to 34 registered a total of 2,207 divorces in 2006 and accounted for the largest increase from 1996 to 2006 compared to other age groups (see Figures 1.4.1 and 1.4.2). Research studies in Singapore have attempted to establish a relation between divorce and early marriages, postulating that people who marry at a younger age are less equipped to make complex choices within a marriage. They also have fewer resources to make marriage and family formation a success and are likely to receive less support and approval from their parents and spouses (Tan, 1977; Subordinate Courts of Singapore, 2003). Another surprising observation from the statistics is the increasing trend of marital dissolution among older couples in non-Muslim marriages. Most divorcees in this category are aged 50 and above, without dependent children below the age of 18. It is likely that these late divorces occurred because these older petitioners realised that after their children had already grown up, there were no longer any other compelling reasons to cling on to the marriage (National Family Council, Singapore, 2005).
According to the Singapore Department of Statistics (2007), the median marriage duration has dipped from 11.1 years a decade ago to 9.6 years in 2006. The decrease is primarily the result of the decline in marriage duration among non-Muslim divorces. (see
Figure 1.5). However, non-Muslims divorcees still registered a longer median duration of marriage compared to their Muslim counterparts. In 2006, the median duration of marriage for divorcing non-Muslims was 10.1 years whereas for Muslims, it was 7.8 years (see Figure 1.5). Although the median duration of both Muslim and non-Muslim marriages showed a steady decline, the gap between the two has been less consistent throughout the period.

![Figure 1.5. Median Duration of Muslim and Non-Muslim Marriages (Dept. of Statistics, 2006)](image)

**Early Divorces**

Clarke (1995) noted that in the West, half of the marriages of less than seven years ended in divorce. In Singapore, however, the median duration of marriages is 13 years. A closer look at the Singaporean data (Singapore Subordinate Court Research Bulletin, 2003) indicates that 65% of individuals who were undergoing civil divorce proceedings in the Family Court already had problems in their marriage within the first five years but preferred to remain in the union for a longer period. Martin & Bumpass (1989) suggested that this trend reflects differences in social tolerance of divorce between Singapore and the
West, given that Singapore has a relatively traditional Eastern culture where the norms of tolerance of difficult marriages may be greater than those of the more individualistic and rights-oriented West.

**Higher Divorce Rates Among Younger Couples in Singapore**

Age at marriage has consistently been found to be a good predictor of divorce in a number of developed countries (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). In general, teenage marriage has been found to be at higher risk of divorce. In Singapore, there is a growing phenomenon of marriages among the young breaking up, as reported by the Singapore Department of Statistics (2004). This department also reported that in 2006 the divorce rates rose sharply and the highest was among younger married persons. It was 52 per 1,000 for males aged 20-24 years and 38 per 1,000 for females in the same age group. Besides teenage and young couples, there were also an increasing number of divorces among young non-Muslim couples with marriages under five years. The majority of these non-Muslim divorced couples did not have children.

A 1979 study discovered that among the total sample of divorcees, those who married young had more serious problems during marriage than those who married at a later age (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1979, p. 84). This trend appears to have remained unchanged as more recent statistics indicate that young married couples aged 30 to 44 registered the highest rate of increase in divorce (Liaw, 2007). While the factors behind this trend have not been thoroughly investigated, a possible hypothesis could be the diminishing stigma associated with divorce among this age group (Liaw, 2007). In fact, according to the National Youth Survey (2002), more than half (54%) of youths approved of divorce when mutual love ceased to exist in the marriage, regardless of whether there were children from the union. Young women tended to support divorce more than men in
the survey, testifying to the growing independence and liberalism of young women in Singapore.

**Increase in Divorces among Older Individuals in Singapore**

Many older marriages are also breaking up, particularly among non-Muslims. In 2003, 21% of the marriages that ended in divorce had lasted for 30 years or more. Most of the petitioners aged 50 years and above did not have dependants below 18 years of age. Unlike younger couples who cited “unreasonable behaviour” as the main reason for splitting up, half of these “empty nesters” who filed for divorce said they had been living apart from each other (Zainol, 2004). Apparently they had been unhappy for a long time, but delayed divorcing because their children were still young. Interestingly, women were the ones who tended to initiate the divorce as they believed that their responsibilities were over after their children had come of age and become independent; and they found no other reasons to cling on to their marriage. The desire to be free from familial bonds and to pursue what they liked, independent of their spouses, may have been another compelling reason for some older women to seek a separate life. Women also said they felt more secure if they could have their share of the matrimonial wealth to prepare for old age and to forestall the husbands from squandering away the family wealth. Some other women said they felt a desire to spend as they wished on themselves without the constraints of family and spouse.

Having examined the divorce trends in Singapore, this chapter now explores the concept of divorce as a passage of transition.
The Process of Divorce

Some researchers have conceptualized divorce as a “social transition” rather than a “life crisis” (Katz & Pesach, 1985). Such a view of divorce as a process or life transition highlights two salient factors. First, divorce is conceived of an inherent social process rather than a single discrete event that influences an individual’s life. Marriages that end in divorce usually start with a process of unravelling, estrangement or emotional separation years before the legal divorce. The most stressful phase of the divorce is usually the period leading up to formal separation while the process of unravelling and family dissolution continues, coupled with numerous potentially life-changing transitions (Demo & Supple, 2003). Second, this approach shifts the understanding of divorce from an experience that is potentially stigmatising and debilitating to one that provides possible opportunities for positive adjustments and personal growth.

Divorce is popularly recognised as the legal dissolution of a marital arrangement and often assumed as a single event in a person’s life (Tan-Tzer, 1988). However, this understanding of divorce may be too narrow. In actuality, the divorce process normally involves a journey from a previously satisfactory marital relationship to escalating discontent and finally, the decision to take legal action and terminate the marriage (Tan-Tzer, 1988). In Singapore, and probably in many other countries as well, most marriages would have ceased to exist emotionally long before the formal divorce. Therefore, by the time the divorce process is well underway, the marriages would have become almost impossible to save, with contending couples reporting reluctance to work on reconciliation (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1979).

Divorce can also be conceived of as a passage of life transition often associated with major changes in one’s personal well-being (Terhell, Marjolein, Broese & Tilburg, 2004). Transitions are turning points that mark the beginning of something new while
signifying the ending of something familiar. Melichar & Chiriboga (1985) suggested looking at divorce through a “process-oriented” framework in which divorce is conceptualised in terms of such transitions. The early stages of transitions are marked by the decision to divorce, the physical act of separation, the legal act of filing a petition to divorce, and finally getting the divorce made absolute. Although not a comprehensive list, these marker points form the basis of most divorce events.

Wallerstein & Kelly (1980) posited that divorces are usually an accumulation of stressful events which lead up to marital dissolution. Research findings suggest that apart from the death of a spouse, divorce requires more readjustment than any other stressful event in our society (Bloom, Hodges & Caldwell, 1983; Krumrei et al., 2007). This is because divorce sets in motion a series of disruptions which may result in lesser financial well-being, lower standards of living and a loss of friends (Krumrei et al., 2007). Examples of the upheavals that accompany divorce include changes in identity, family interaction, life goals, routine, finances and social life. Moreover, unlike some transitions such as ageing, that have a well-defined chronology, divorce is an unscheduled and usually unplanned transition that can occur at any stage of one’s adult life cycle. Such unpredictability further intensifies the discomfort experienced in a divorce and reduces the control that can be exerted by the persons involved.

Ahrons (1995) conceptualised a “five component process” that makes up the giant transition called divorce: (a) the decision (individual cognition); (b) the announcement (family meta-cognition); (c) the separation (systemic separation); (d) the formal divorce (systemic reorganisation); and (e) the aftermath (family redefinition).

The first three transitions (the decision, the announcement, and the separation) are believed to be the most testing disruptions and are typically characterised by ambivalence, confusion and stress. They mark the shift from the private to the public phase where
conflict, which was once kept within the confines of the marital relationship, is subsequently disclosed to family, friends and professional help and legal agencies. At the separation stage, the couple no longer enacts the public rituals of their marriage and for most children, it is the first time that they realise the enormity of the breakdown of their parents’ marital relationship. The final two transitions involve the confirmation of the status of a divorced person, followed by a long-term adaptation to one’s new roles and status (Chiriboga & Cutler, 1977). However, the exact point of time at which the couples decide to separate and live separately after deciding to end their marriage is not easily defined (Amato, 2000).

Beyond the “five component process”, Chiriboga (1989) included a liminal stage, where individuals seek out new directions for their lives and a re-entry phase to establish a new lifestyle. Wallerstein (1986) proposed a somewhat similar model that highlights key tasks that an individual performs in the divorce process: (a) the gradual disengagement from the failed marriage; (b) the resolution or control of the passions and anxieties stirred by marital rupture; (c) the distancing and stabilisation of the post-divorce relationship with the former spouse; and (d) the construction of a new and sustained adult relationship and the establishment of social and economic stability after the divorce.

While Ahrons, Chiriboga and Wallerstein proposed various stages in the divorce process, Rossiter (1991) saw the divorce transition not as a linear process involving a stage-by-stage progression, but rather one in which the various tasks and processes identified are usually addressed simultaneously throughout the transition.

**Reasons for Divorce**

The specific reasons and factors that change a marital relationship and precipitate divorce vary greatly. Even so, there are discernible patterns and common characteristics among the myriad of divorces. Tan-Tzer (1988), observed that most divorces share a
certain similarity where, at some point, one or both parties begin to realise the deterioration of the relationship, leading them to believe that the marriage is no longer tolerable and to contemplate taking steps to dissolve it. According to Lowenstein (2005), divorce does not occur because of a single reason and is often attributed to a number of factors. Research by Wolcott & Hughes (1999) identified three key reasons for divorce: (a) affective reasons, including communication problems, incompatibility or drifting apart, and adultery; (b) abusive behaviour such as physical violence, alcohol and substance abuse, and emotional and verbal abuse; and (c) external pressures that include financial problems, mental health, and work and family interference.

Burns (1984) and Eells & O’Flaherty (1996) reported that the most common reasons given by both men and women for the breakdown of their marriage centred on the affective qualities of the relationship, including communication problems. This implies that the “affective” domain is the most important and prevalent. Longitudinal studies conducted by Karney & Bradbury (1995) confirmed that adverse marital outcomes could be linked to deficits in central competencies such as communication, problem solving, and coping. Studies by Kozuch & Cooney (1995) and Schwartzman-Shatman & Schinke (1993) also found that emotional estrangement resulting from an absence of emotional support, lack of common interests, incompatibility, and deficiencies in relevant relationship skills such as a paucity of communication, is more frequently cited as causes of divorce rather than acute problems such as alcoholism or physical abuse. Bodenmann & Cina (2006) confirmed that daily stress was a reliable predictor of divorce, with many participants in their study consistently reporting trivial daily events as important reasons for their decision to divorce. In a study conducted by Amato & Previti (2003), infidelity was the most commonly reported cause for divorce, followed by incompatibility and drifting apart. It was also noted that the petitioners’ specific reasons for divorce varied with gender, social class and life
course variables such as age at marriage (Elder, 1994; Bumpass et al., 1991). Women were seen to be more aware of relationship problems sooner, and were more likely to initiate discussion with their partners (Thompson & Walker, 1991). On the contrary, men tended to withdraw from any form of discussion of relationship problems (Albrechet, Bahr & Goodman, 1983; Kitson, 1992; Gottman, 1994). This may explain, according to these studies, why wives are more likely than husbands to initiate divorce.

In comparison, Kitson & Holmes (1992) conducted a longitudinal study in the United States and found that the frequent reasons for divorce included alcoholism, a lack of communication or understanding, getting married at a young age, problems with in-laws and relatives, and extramarital sex. According to Kitson & Holmes (1992) other factors that were given for divorce, included constant arguments, inflexibility, stubbornness, over-commitment to work, insufficient time spent together and conflict over roles.

Other consistently cited divorce reasons by men and women included basic unhappiness, loss of love, incompatibility, mental illness or emotional problems, and spouses’ personality traits (Burns, 1984; Wolcott, 1984; Cleek & Pearson, 1985; Gigy & Kelly, 1992; Noller et. al., 1997). However, Gottman (1994) argued that marriages that appeared to be unhappy or have elements of dissatisfaction might not necessarily be the same ones that result in divorce. He cautioned that the causes of divorce are not one-dimensional but a constellation of factors cascading toward marital dissolution. It is useful, in addition to understanding the specific reasons people give for divorcing, to know whether these reasons are connected or linked with post-divorce adjustment. In short, while there may be varied and legitimate reasons cited for divorce, these publicly cited reasons may not be the real underlying and true causes of marriage break-ups. Finally, it is pertinent to compare the reasons for divorce delineated by the various studies above with a
review of reasons for divorce in Singapore under the Women’s Charter and Syariah Court in the last section of this chapter.

Reasons for Divorce under the Women’s Charter

According to the Department of Statistics, among non-Muslim divorces in Singapore, the two main reasons cited for dissolution in 2006 were unreasonable behaviour (49%) and living apart separately for three years or more (48%). Adultery accounted for only 2% of the stated reasons for divorce and desertion for slightly less (see figure 1.6).

Figure 1.6. Reasons for Divorce under the Women’s Charter in 2006

One explanation of why “living apart/separately” is one of the top reasons for divorce is that as long as there is proof that the couple has been living separately for at least three years with mutual consent or four years without mutual consent, it becomes a relatively easy “no fault” legal process of divorce. This legal moratorium may not be
necessary if the petition for divorce is on grounds of exceptional hardship suffered by the petitioner, or if the spouse has been exceptionally unreasonable and cruel (Foo, 2005). However, it is to be noted that the statistics compiled on the reasons for divorce actually refer to the grounds for divorce as defined under the Women’s Charter. They may not necessarily be the actual reasons why the marriages failed. On this point, Wong & Kuo (1983), in their study of divorce in Singapore, raised the salient issue that the legal grounds cited for divorce may not necessarily indicate the true reasons that marriages break up. Under the advice of their legal counsels, petitioners would apply for divorce on grounds generally considered to be sufficient by the court irrespective of the real motivation for divorce. It is thus expedient for couples to seek divorce on the least embarrassing or less socially objectionable grounds such as separation rather than adultery which requires a burden of proof and can be challenged in court. Thus, not surprisingly, the two most frequently cited grounds for divorce under the Women’s Charter are “prolonged separation” and “unreasonable behaviour”. Chan (2008) delineated three reasons that could account for the use of “unreasonable behaviour” as a ground for divorce: (a) there is no requirement for allegations of unreasonable behaviour to be sustained over a specific period; (b) the ease in satisfying the court of the fact of unreasonable behaviour since the petition is based on the petitioner’s inability to tolerate the spouse’s behaviour; and (c) there is no need for any explanation to justify why the marriage failed.

Indeed, there has been very limited research in the last two decades to explain the trend for prolonged separation and unreasonable behaviour to constitute the main legal reasons for divorce. Wong & Kuo (1983) commented that it is quite unlikely that separation and desertion are the real reasons for divorce. The only study to examine the real causes of divorce, conducted by Quah (1999), found that for the 55 divorced respondents who were interviewed, differences in values constituted the most common
cause of divorce (24%). The problems identified with the former spouse related to their differences in “ideals”, “goals”, and “outlook in life”. Another 20% cited differences in character or personality such as “communication breakdown” and “bad temperedness”, leading to a realisation that they could not get along well and had “compatibility” problems. A similar proportion (20%) cited the presence of a third party or infidelity as the cause of divorce. Thus, the frequently cited reasons for divorce may not be the real or true reasons for the marriage break-up. The decision to divorce more often involves a much more painful undertaking than the cited reasons may suggest. Quah (1999) also found that the final decision to divorce was taken by the respondent after careful consideration and after having taken stock of the overall deterioration in the marital relationship.

Gender differences pertaining to the reasons given for divorce were observed in Wong & Kuo’s study (1983). Women tended to view infidelity, behavioural problems and financial indiscretion more seriously than men; while men considered personality problems slightly more important than women. It was also observed that women tended to realise the presence of marital troubles earlier than men (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1979).

**Reasons for Divorce under the Syariah Court**

The reasons for divorces under the Women’s Charter were categorised primarily into four broad areas: unreasonable behaviour, separation, adultery and desertion, with the first two making up 96% of the total as identified by the Singapore Department of Statistics, 2006. However, by contrast, there were further reasons identified and compiled for Muslim divorces. The top five reasons for divorce in 2006 were personality differences, infidelity, inadequate maintenance, neglect and constant nagging. Personality difference was the most common reason cited, but accounting for only 22% of the divorces. This was followed by infidelity, 17% (see figure 1.7). It is interesting to observe the gender differences among Muslims when it comes to grounds for initiating divorce.
Proportionately more men (35%) than women (16%) petitioned on the basis of personality difference, while many more women (20%) than men (2%) petitioned on the basis of inadequate maintenance (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2006). The reasons cited in Figure 1.7 were so varied that they are more likely to be the “real” reasons for divorce, in contrast to the ones cited under the Women’s Charter as displayed in Figure 1.6.

Figure 1.7. Reasons for Divorce under the Administration of Muslim Law Act in 2006
Conclusion

The rate of divorce in Singapore has been increasing over the last decade. As a high divorce rate is likely to remain a permanent feature of this social landscape, it is important to understand the divorce process and its attendant effects especially with regard to undermining the mental health and well-being of the divorced individuals (Williams & Dunne-Bryant, 2006). To date, there has been limited research in Singapore on post-divorce adjustments. In the last two decades, no studies have been conducted to explain how divorced individuals fare and transit into a new life. The only local study, conducted in 1979 by the then Ministry of Social Affairs, concurred with international research that divorce is a distressing event, but its findings also indicated that positive post-divorce adjustment was possible for the majority of the respondents. More research needs to be conducted on the impact of divorce and the process of the post-divorce adjustment in Singapore. Hence, this thesis seeks to establish the psychological and emotional consequences of divorce and the process of post-divorce adjustment. It endeavours to answer the question “How do individuals make post-divorce adjustments?” In order to provide a backdrop to answer this question in the Singapore context, the next chapter (Chapter 2) provides an overview of the psychological impact of divorce and the factors that may contribute to positive post-divorce adjustments and growth through a review of literature on this subject.
CHAPTER 2

AN OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE ON POST-DIVORCE ADJUSTMENT

As discussed in Chapter 1, hitherto research on marital dissolutions has focused primarily on experiences of distress, rather than positive post-divorce outcomes or growth (e.g., Gove, 1973, Schoenborn & Marano, 1988, Trovato & Lauris, 1989, Amato, 2000, Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007). Several other researchers, however, (Veevers, 1991; Shantall, 2003; Emmons, 2003) have suggested a new rhetoric, in which the orientation of “divorce as disaster” is debated and perhaps replaced by “divorce as development”. This chapter reviews evidence which goes against the view that divorce leads only to financial, emotional and psychological hardship. The evidence examined includes post-divorce experiences and variables that contribute to such positive adjustment.

This approach is in line with Richardson’s (2002) recommendation to study individuals who are able to adjust and grow through the divorce experience, with a view to identifying and teaching relevant skills that could enable more people to grow. To date, only a few researchers have asserted that a marital break-up could also function as an impetus for personal growth (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). This type of growth is also called “stress-related growth” or “post-traumatic growth” and it is a phenomenon in which people may grow beyond their previous level of psychological functioning as a result of highly stressful life experiences (Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998). Several researchers have noted that the painful struggle to come to terms with a stressful event is a source of potential benefit, but for growth to take place, some degree of psychological discomfort must occur. Thus, positive changes can follow negative changes due to stressful
experiences (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2002). These occurrences have been observed within a wide variety of life events, including trauma (Shapiro, 2001; Parnell 2007) bereavement (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998) and divorce (Tashiro, Frazier, & Burman, 2006).

This chapter begins with an overview of research on post-divorce adjustment and examines what is known about the psychological impact of divorce on individuals. The second part of the chapter focuses on the relevance of applying the term “post-traumatic growth” to the experiences of divorcees and identifies factors that facilitate this process.

**Typical Negative Responses to Highly Stressful Events**

In the broadest definition, highly stressful events can be referred to as “traumas” – experiences that cause one to develop erroneous beliefs about oneself or the world, and to behave in ways that are not skilful (Parnell, 2007). This definition is evident in the work of Tedeschi & Calhoun (2004) who postulated that individuals who experience traumas typically display emotional distress and dysfunctional patterns of thinking. In particular, individuals who face highly threatening events are more prone to repetitive intrusions of thought and images of the challenging event (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Shapiro (2001) identified two types of trauma: major trauma and minor trauma. Major trauma, such as war experiences and violent crimes such as rape, can jolt one out of one’s usual perspective on life and could often lead to debilitating symptoms and conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and phobias. Minor trauma, such as failing an examination or losing a job, comprise experiences that could cause one to have a lesser sense of self-confidence and assault one’s sense of self-efficacy. They can cause one to develop narrow and limiting views of oneself and the world, and keep one from living to one’s fullest potential.
For many, divorce is experienced as a minor rather than major trauma. Divorced individuals are more likely to experience physical and psychological disturbances that are more consistent with the symptoms of minor trauma (Gove, 1972a, 1972b; Briscoe & Smith, 1974; Chiriboga, 1982; Menaghan & Lieberman, 1986). Correspondingly, Gullo (1992) coined the term “love-shock” to describe the state of emotional emptiness and disorientation following the trauma of losing a significant love relationship.

Affective responses to traumatic events can include sadness, guilt, anger, general irritability, intense yearning, numbness, shock and fatigue (Raphael, 1983; Rando, 1993, 1996; Neimeyer, 1998, 2002; Enright & Marwit, 2002; Worden, 2002). Weiss (1975) also observed that couples alternate between anger and ambivalence much of the time as they move towards divorce. Guilt feelings are generally understood to be a significant component of the divorce experience. Wallerstein & Kelly (1980) observed that divorced individuals often feel guilty about the negative effects of their divorce on their children and about their own abandonment of culturally-accepted definitions of the good parent, husband or wife.

Divorce can affect individuals on the physiological and cognitive levels as well. Physiological responses to divorce can include unpleasant physical reactions such as fatigue, muscle tension and aches, gastric pain and general physical discomfort (Bloom, Hodges, Caldwell, 1983; Marks & Lambert, 1998; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Krumrei et al., 2007). Cognitively, individuals facing significant life problems can develop distressing and dysfunctional patterns of thinking. Initial reactions of disbelief and the experience of psychological numbness are commonly replaced by intrusive ruminating thoughts, and sometimes intrusive images (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). After a divorce, individuals are often concerned about unattained goals which were previously thought possible. Divorcees have reported experiencing event-related rumination, reviewing the discrepancy involving
the unattained goals and the lack of acceptable explanation for the divorce that occurred (Martin & Tesser, 1996). Another kind of cognitive process that seems also to contribute to high levels of distress is regret, blame and repeated consideration of how the divorce could have been avoided (Greenberg, 1995).

A divorce is not only considered a “trauma” that leads initially to affective, physiological and cognitive responses as discussed above, but also a process that ushers in fundamental changes in life. Associated with adjustments, is the level of stress that an individual experiences in adapting to the new reality of being and living as a divorced person. The nature and extent of this stress is discussed in detail in the sections following.

**Divorce and Psychological Stress**

Divorces and the stress associated with it, is a subjective experience as is the experience of adjustment. Kitson (1992, p. 18) highlighted that divorce “usually entails a pileup of events each of which may contribute to a wrenching series of losses: loss of friends and family, loss of status, possibly loss of one’s children and sometimes loss of financial security”.

Faced with this series of losses, individuals may conclude that they themselves are inadequate or unacceptable, and thus feel rejected as a person (Kitson & Holmes, 1992). Consequently, stress occurs as there is a perceived or actual imbalance between what is actually happening and what a divorcee feels capable of managing. Divorce has been identified as one of the most significant life stresses an individual may encounter (Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Booth & Amato, 1991). It is a disruptive and emotionally draining process (Bursik, 1991a & b) that involves problematic social, economic, physical, mental, psychological and emotional changes (Walters-Chapman, Price & Serovich, 1995). In a similar vein, McCubbin & Patterson, 1982 argued that the stress level an individual
experiences is dependent on three factors: (a) the number of stressors that pile up; (b) the resources available to deal with the problem; and (c) the manner in which the individuals perceive and appraise the situation.

Divorce usually ushers in a series of stressors which may include economic deterioration (Duncan & Hoffman, 1985), lower standards of living (Shapiro, 1996), loss of friendships (Ross, 1995) and the need to move residence (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Further distress is induced as these stressors also translate to the loss of resources, such as economic benefits and emotional support that could offer buffers against transitional stress. In particular, women who have devoted themselves to raising a family and making a home are likely to suffer more following a divorce. They have a higher tendency to appraise the divorce negatively, and this may result in feelings of “lowered self-esteem” and “demoralisation”, especially after unsuccessful job-searching (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Thabes (1997) in a study on women’s long-term post-divorce adjustment found that income levels influenced depression among divorced women. A lower income after divorce is related to more mood disturbance (Berman & Turk, 1981), depression (Pearlin & Johnson, 1977), and more difficulties in social adjustment (Pett, 1982; Pett & Vaughan-Cole, 1986; Thabes, 1997).

Family relationships are another major source of ongoing strain during and after divorce, as the family system undergoes reorganization. Conflict between ex-spouses often continues, especially if children are involved (Berman, 1985). Williams & Dunne-Bryant (2006) confirmed that the group whose well-being appears to be most negatively affected by marital dissolution are parents of young children. Moreover, a more troubled relationship with the former spouse is associated with poorer social adjustment, at least among women (Nelson, 1981).
Stress arising from divorce undermines adult health and well-being. Divorced individuals are more likely to be depressed and at risk of health problems and psychiatric disorder than their unmarried counterparts (Amato 2000). Studies indicate that divorce is worse for women’s mental health than for men’s (e.g., Simon & Marcussen, 1990; Aseltine & Kessler, 1993, Marks & Lambert, 1998; Simon 2002). Men are more likely to exhibit externalised behavioural expressions of distress, such as alcohol abuse, whereas women are more likely to internalise emotional distress, and hence are at higher risk of developing depression (Horwitz & Davies, 1994). Given the context of stress in a divorce, and the possible acute reactions that individuals may experience, it is appropriate at this juncture to discuss the concept of adjustment disorder and its relevance to divorced individuals.

Adjustment Disorder as a Diagnostic Category

Adjustment disorder is a disorder of varying severity that occurs as a reaction to overwhelming stress in persons who have no apparent underlying mental disorders. The technically revised version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, *DSM-IV-TR* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) states that “the essential feature of an adjustment disorder is a psychological response to an identifiable stressor that results in the development of clinically significant emotional or behavioural symptoms” (p. 679). Adjustment disorder, in some ways, is a hopeful diagnosis as it is normally a time-limited condition with manifestations arriving almost immediately after the appearance of the pressure-causing event and resolving itself within six months of the elimination of the stressor. Chronic adjustment disorder is the term used to define a condition in which an individual continues to be affected mentally six months or more after the stressors have been removed.
Diagnosis of an adjustment disorder in someone who has undergone the stress of divorce requires a decision as to whether the manifestation of psychopathology truly represents a stress response. The context in which a person is diagnosed should also be assessed. For example, a parent who is being accused by an ex-partner or evaluated in an antagonistic court process that is seeking to apportion blame could demonstrate behaviours that he or she does not exhibit in normal and less stressful circumstances. Johnston & Campbell (1988) found that severe de-compensation exhibited by divorced persons appeared to be more situational and relational, rather than pathological.

An adjustment disorder is usually associated with a certain degree of psychopathology (e.g., depression or anxiety). The DSM-IV-TR specifies six subtypes of adjustment disorder, (see Table 2.1) and each with its own diverse group of predominant symptom presentations and degree of impairment. The subtype assigned in a clinical setting is usually based on the presence of the most predominant features.
Table 2.1

**Subtypes of Adjustment Disorder**

Adjustment disorders are coded based on the subtype, which is selected according to the predominant symptoms. The specific stressor(s) can be specified on Axis IV.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>309.0</td>
<td>With Depressed Mood: when the predominant manifestations are symptoms such as depressed mood, tearfulness, or feelings of hopelessness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>309.24</td>
<td>With Anxiety: when the predominant manifestations are symptoms such as nervousness, worry, or jitteriness, or, in children, fears of separation from major attachment figures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>309.28</td>
<td>With Mixed Anxiety and Depressed Mood: when the predominant manifestation is a combination of depression and anxiety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>309.3</td>
<td>With Disturbance of Conduct: when the predominant manifestation is a disturbance in conduct in which there is violation of the rights of others or of major age-appropriate societal norms or rules (e.g., truancy, vandalism, reckless driving, fighting, defaulting on legal responsibilities).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>309.4</td>
<td>With Mixed Disturbance of Emotions and Conduct: when the predominant manifestations are both emotional symptoms (e.g., depression, anxiety) and a disturbance of conduct (see above subtype).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>309.9</td>
<td>Unspecified: for maladaptive reactions (e.g., physical complaints, social withdrawal, or work or academic inhibition) to stressors that are not classifiable as one of the specific subtypes of Adjustment Disorder.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Relevance of Adjustment Disorder to the Experiences of Divorcees**

Various research studies have shown divorce to be associated with increased risk of mental illness (Goode, 1949; Walters-Chapman, Price, & Serovich, 1995); emotional, psychological and health problems (Bloom, Asher, & White, 1978; Chiriboga, Roberts, & Stein, 1978; Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1978; Weiss, 1975; Bruce & Kim, 1992; Gordon, 1995); as well as with injury, (McMurray, 1970). Much of what has been discussed by
these researchers in the areas of divorce experiences is similar in nature to the subtypes of adjustment disorder identified in DSM-IV-TR (2000) (see Table 2.1).

Research conducted by Pledge (1992) and Krumrei et al. (2007) highlights a number of physical and psychological manifestations of stress arising from a divorce, some of which are similar to the symptoms of adjustment disorder. These manifestations include (a) increased susceptibility to infectious diseases and other illnesses; (b) sleeplessness; (c) impairment of concentration; (d) anxiety, depression, anger and feelings of rejection; (e) identity crisis; and (f) alcoholism. One study showed that divorced Asian women may express negative emotions in the form of physical symptoms or problematic behaviours consistent with adjustment disorder, such as insomnia, headaches, accidents, poor concentration, and having suicidal thoughts (Law, 1991). The stress brought about by a divorce also appears to increase an individual’s susceptibility to adjustment disorder. This applies particularly to East and Southeast Asian divorced women who are habituated to comply with social norms and cultural expectations that are deeply rooted in the traditional Confucian concept of the complete family. According to one Singapore study (Wong, Yeoh, Graham & Teo, 2004) the state tends to “configure the divorcee as ‘unfortunate’ and constituting an unhealthy trend in opposition to the dual-parent household” (p. 43). Wan (1993) earlier found that after divorce, single-parent mothers experienced a high degree of stress from the parent-child relationship and deterioration in their financial status. They are also stigmatised more frequently than single-parent fathers (Chan, 1993; Law, 1991; Young, 1995).

Consistent with this idea that divorce-induced stress tends to increase adjustment disorder, particularly for divorced women living in societies steeped in Confucian tradition, Williams & Bryant (2006) established that the experience of divorce and its consequences for health and well being vary across a range of demographic, contextual and
psychological factors. Notwithstanding the different modes of response to divorce, it can be either devastating or liberating, depending on the individual’s circumstances and background (Hetherington, 2003).

In their research, King & Raspin (2004) commented that working towards a valued goal is an important aspect of psychological (Brunstein, 1993) and physical (Emmons & King, 1988) well-being. However, there is also the risk that emotionally investing in one’s future, hopes and dreams may mean experiencing disappointment when things do not go well (Kernis, Paradise, Whitaker, Wheatman & Goldman, 2000). Marriage is a very significant life-event with major emotional investment in the future and hopes; therefore the descriptions of divorce in terms of loss and the recovery process are sometimes akin to mourning (Bohannon, 1970; Kessler, 1975; Rice & Rice, 1986; Weiss, 1976 & Wiseman, 1975). The sadness and disappointment might progress to various sub-types of adjustment disorders with depressed mood, anxiety, mixed anxiety and depression, conduct disturbance, and a combination of mood and conduct disturbance. An individual’s psychological adaptation after marital disruption is also influenced by individual variables, such as the personality factors of optimism and perceived control (Thuen & Rise, 2006). Therefore those vulnerable to loss and conflicts arising from attachment are more likely to experience adjustment disorders.

Other Factors Influencing Adjustment

Other factors identified which can influence how individuals react to a divorce include age (Chiriboga, 1982); gender (Wallerstein, 1986; Thabes, 1997); social support (Weiss, 1975; Garvin, Kalter, & Hansell, 1993); coping style (Chiriboga, 1989); degree of attachment to the ex-spouse (Weiss, 1975; Reibstein, 1998); the presence of children (Amato, 2000); length of separation (Chiriboga & Cutler, 1977); and personal qualities of
independence and self-esteem (Colletta, 1979). These factors, (which are discussed at length in the later part of this chapter), affect the individual’s cognitive understanding, vulnerability, and psychological capacity to cope with the trauma of divorce. Some of these factors contain within them elements of personal resilience. Flach (1988) defined resilience as the “psychological and biological strengths” required to effectively manage change (p. 11). Therefore, resilience guides individuals to search for and develop strengths and resources that enable them to grow following stressful life events. Friedman (2002) expanded the definition of resilience further by including the individual’s ability to thrive with significant resourcefulness in the face of extreme and daily challenge.

Much of the earlier discussion in this chapter has centred on exploring the negative impact of divorce. However, beyond the initial negativity, there is the distinct possibility that an individual can arrive at positive gains post-divorce. The focus of the subsequent discussion shifts to examine the concept of positive post-divorce adjustment and growth.

**Positive Post-divorce Adjustment**

That post-divorce adjustment is often painful and negative has been well documented. Researchers have shown that divorce adjustment can also be positive. Several models have been developed that identify the positive aspects of post-divorce adjustment. Waller & Hill (1951) proposed the earliest model for divorce adjustment which involved four stages: (a) breaking old habits; (b) reconstructed life; (c) seeking new love objects; and, (d) readjustment completed. This model, which is developmental in nature, reflects a process in which behavioural change leads predictably to positive growth. Hetherington & Kelly (2002) went further and described six different patterns of how people adjust to divorce (see table 2.2):
Table 2.2

**Patterns of Divorce Adjustments**

(a) *Enhancers:* They flourish and discover skills and talents that would have remained undiscovered if they had stayed in the marriage.
(b) *Competent Loners:* They build a meaningful and happy life without marriage or lifelong companion.
(c) *Good-Enoughs:* They resist insights and continue to experience the same relationship problems.
(d) *Seekers:* They want to marry quickly after being divorced and are more inclined to abuse alcohol or other substances.
(e) *Libertines:* They enjoy their new freedom but at the end of the first year after divorce, many of them find life empty and pointless.
(f) *The Defeated:* They succumb to depression and a sense of purposelessness. They often remain bitter over the life they have lost.


Other researchers have described divorce adjustment as (a) situational “states”, determined by the presence of certain conditions (Bohannon, 1970; Kessler, 1975); (b) a process similar to the Kubler-Ross (1969) grief model which proposed stages of grief of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally acceptance (Wiseman, 1975; Froiland & Hozman, 1977); (c) developmental stages in emotional identification and adaptation (Orlinsky, 1972); (d) legal and personal or emotional developmental stages (Kressel, 1980); and (e) dynamics of family adaptation (Ahrons, 1980; Ahrons & Rodgers, 1987). Ahrons (1980) presented a model that takes into account the total family’s functioning in the divorce adjustment process. Within a systemic context, she defined the process as moving from individual to family awareness, systemic separation and reorganization, and finally, family redefinition (Ahrons, 1980; Ahrons & Rodgers, 1987). Subsequently, Emery (1994) also identified similar phases in the renegotiation of family relationships post-divorce.
In comparing models of adjustment, it would appear that all of them embrace the possibilities of constructive change which could lead to growth in adults’ post-divorce functioning. In addition, the stage models also suggest that divorced individuals go through various phases, over a period of time, before developing new resources and strengths that enable them to make positive gains. It is pertinent at this point to examine the time period that individuals may take to adjust positively to the divorce.

**Duration of Divorce Adjustment**

In a study on the impact of divorce, Wallerstein & Kelly (1980) found that even 18 months after divorce, most parents and children had not adjusted to the disruptions created by divorce. The participants they studied had experienced a period of 18 to 24 months of post-separation adjustment, involving personal and interpersonal turmoil. Other studies (Amato 2000; Booth & Amato, 1991) confirmed that, on average, people take two years before they regain equilibrium, as sufficient time is required to detach oneself from an ex-spouse and to work towards establishing a stable new lifestyle. It would appear that after two years, it is possible for people to develop as individuals instead of as a couple and lead meaningful lives again.

Hetherington, Cox & Cox (1982) found that within the first year following their legal divorces, most people in their sample group immersed themselves in a flurry of self-improvement activities. However, by the end of that year, many were depressed, functioned poorly and felt that the divorce had been a mistake. But by the end of an 18- to 24-month period after divorce, many respondents managed to attain co-operative relationships with their ex-spouses, and with their children, if any (Ahrons, 1980).
There has been no research on post-divorce adjustments in Singapore in the three decades since the study conducted by the Ministry of Social Affairs in 1979. That study revealed that in the area of emotional and psychological disturbances (e.g., feeling of loneliness), depression was the commonest problem, shared by more than half of all divorcees, both men and women at the time of filing for divorce. Yet, by the time the divorce was legally granted, the depression had declined significantly. Emotional adjustment and financial difficulties seemed to be experiences shared by many of the divorcees. In the 1979 study, more female than male divorcees cited financial difficulties as a problem which remained relatively unchanged for the women before and after divorce. The data also confirmed that female divorcees experienced more problems than men across the entire divorce process. They perceived more problems during marriage, at the time of separation, and after divorce. Fifty-five percent of the female respondents identified the most common problems, in ranked order, as (a) social criticism; (b) ill health; (c) child care; and (d) housing.

Despite the fact that many divorcees considered their divorce to be a traumatic experience, most of them seemed to be well-adjusted soon after divorce. In the 1979 study, the findings showed that 90% of the 371 respondents reported that they had successfully adjusted and were happier than before divorce. About 40% of the respondents had adjusted to divorce even before the court decision was handed down. By the end of the first year of the divorce, more than 60% of the divorcees had “adjusted successfully” to their new status as divorcees. For respondents who were interviewed more than one year after their divorce, 10.3% reported that they were “adjusting well”, but a substantial proportion (18.5%) could not tell if they had adjusted well.
Having highlighted the possibilities of positive development post-divorce, the next part of this chapter explores this process and the potential areas of growth for divorced individuals. The understanding of post-traumatic growth informs the process of arriving at positive gains post-divorce. The next section explains the key tenets of post-traumatic growth.

**Post-traumatic Growth**


Post-traumatic growth is both a process and an outcome. Tedeschi & Calhoun (2004) described the concept of post-traumatic growth as the experience of positive change that occurs as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life crises. Suffering arising from a crisis can lead to three possible outcomes (a) ongoing impairment; (b) return to a pre-trauma level of psychosocial functioning; or (c) attainment of a higher level of psychosocial functioning than prior to the trauma. The notion that a person may attain a higher level of psychosocial functioning as a result of the experience of trauma is well evidenced in cultural literature and in philosophical and religious writings.

Growth is derived from a cognitive process that begins with questioning how one can move towards a preferred future, given the backdrop of trauma. This questioning may cause anxiety and pain that is initially difficult to manage. As further processing takes place, new psychological constructs may emerge to rebuild a new way of living, in which
one has developed superior inner resources for coping better with similar trauma in future should the need arise. This cognitive process eventually leads to an appreciation of a new-
found strength and new behaviours that involve better care of self and others (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995).

A distinction is also be made between post-traumatic growth and the concepts of resilience, hardiness, optimism, and sense of coherence. All these concepts describe certain characteristics that enable individuals to manage challenges well. Resilience is usually considered a capacity to return to normalcy after hardship and adversity. Hardiness (Kobasa, 1979) is founded on the qualities of commitment and problem-solving capabilities. People high in hardiness believe they can influence events and believe that they can meet the challenges of life with their personal strengths. Optimism involves expectations of positive outcomes to events (Scheier & Carver, 1985). A sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1987) is experienced by persons who are able to manage stress, because they are able to relate to events by finding meaning in them and seeing these events in a larger context. In contrast to each of these concepts, post-traumatic growth refers to an inner change that goes beyond the ability to cope with stressful life events; it involves a movement beyond pre-trauma levels of adaptation. But unlike the superficially similar concepts of resilience, sense of coherence, optimism, and hardiness, post-traumatic growth has a quality of transformation or a qualitative change in functioning (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995).

**Domains of Post-traumatic Growth**

According to Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996), post-traumatic growth is manifested in a variety of ways, including (a) a greater appreciation of life and changed sense of priorities; (b) warmer, more intimate relationships with others; (c) a greater sense of personal
strength; (d) recognition of new possibilities or paths for one’s life; and (e) spiritual
development (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

An increased appreciation for life in general, along with a changed sense of what is
important, is a common element in the experience of many persons who have struggled
with major difficulties. Individuals typically report this as a major shift in how they
approach and experience their daily lives. A typical change in priorities involves an
increase in the importance of what might before have been considered the “little things”,
and the recognition of the importance of things formerly taken for granted. Closer, more
intimate, and more meaningful relationships with others can also be part of the individual’s
experience. A general sense of increased personal strength, or the recognition of possessing
personal strength, is another domain. Growth in the domain of spiritual and existential
matters is often manifested in greater engagement with fundamental existential questions.
Each of the five domains of post-traumatic growth tends to have a paradoxical element:
that out of loss there is gain (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2002).

Radford et al. (1997) conducted a study on divorced women, and found that these
women were functioning at higher level as compared to pre-divorce. The women reported
experiencing the domains of growth as described by Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996). They had
settled into their new identity as divorced women, learned to value and redefine the self,
developed new relationships, and re-worked the old relationships with friends, ex-spouses
and their children. They had looked for ways to integrate themselves into a social world
and found meaningful involvement in activities such as church or community
organizations.

Although no studies have been conducted specifically on post-divorce in
Singapore, the earlier study conducted on non-Muslim marriages by the Ministry of Social
Affairs (1979) indicated that divorced individuals can experience a measure of relief and
happiness. Indeed, 32.8% of the 371 respondents felt a sense of relief, while 16.9% reported feeling happy at the time when the divorce decree was granted. The same study also revealed that over 90% of the respondents reported that they were successfully adjusted at the time of the study. Almost the same percentage of respondents felt that they were happier then as compared to before the divorce; and 37.2% of the respondents reported that they were very successful in their level of divorce adjustment. Only 8.9% of the respondents reported that they were not successful in adjusting to the divorce.

As divorce becomes more common in a modern 21st century society, it has been recognised as a major life event, requiring adaptation for optimal positive outcome. In fact, divorce could be conceived of as a chance for growth and an opportunity for constructive change (Kaffman & Talmon, 1984). The next section of this chapter focuses on identifying and discussing key variables influencing the process of adaptation, which can lead to positive outcomes.

**Variables Influencing Post-traumatic Growth**

Clinicians have addressed the ways in which critical life crises offer possibilities for positive personal change (Yalom & Lieberman, 1991; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). However, whether trauma will lead to resultant growth is dependent on an individual's cognitive engagement with and cognitive processing of trauma (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1998). As suggested by Epstein (1990) and Janoff & Bulman (1992), individuals develop and apply a set of beliefs and assumptions about the world that guides their decisions and actions. Park (1971) refers to this general constellation as the “assumptive world”. Major life crises, such as a divorce, can present major challenges to an individual’s understanding of this world and lead to high levels of psychological distress. Such threats to the assumptive world may lead to a process of cognitive restructuring that takes into account
the changed reality of one’s life after the divorce and produces new schemas that
incorporate the divorce and possible events in the future, and that are more resistant to
future traumas. These results are experienced as growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Studies have shown that growth is positively related to problem-focused coping
strategies such as active coping (Wild & Paivio, 2003); planning (Park & Fenster, 2004);
and positive reappraisal (Sears, Stanton, & Danoff-Burg, 2003); emotion-focused coping
strategies like emotional support coping (Thornton & Perez, 2006); and religious coping
strategies (Park, 2006). Personal characteristics, such as self-esteem (Abraido-Lanza,
Guier, & Colon, 1998) and mastery (Park & Fenster, 2004) may also serve as inner
resources that facilitate growth. Environmental characteristics such as social support are
commonly studied in relation to growth, with the majority of studies reporting a positive
relationship (e.g., Siegel, Schrimshaw & Pretter, 2005). The variables highlighted above
facilitate the development of “strens”. Hollister (1967) introduced the term “stren” to
define events which somehow bolster our capacities to meet the demands, problems, and
traumas of life. The probability of positive post-divorce growth would appear to be related
to an individual’s ability to interpret stressors as “strens”.

In reviewing literature to find answers to the questions of what kinds of people are
they likely to adjust positively after divorce and under what conditions, Veevers (1991)
identified 17 “strens”. “Strens” are variables that could translate divorce adjustment into a
“strengthening experience rather than a traumatic one” (Veevers, 1991, p. 116). These
“strens” facilitate post-divorce adjustment, which is a preamble to post-traumatic growth.

Individuals, who possess the “strens” listed in Tables 2.3.1 to 2.3.4, are likely to
have more capacity to engage in the process of cognitive restructuring and develop new
beliefs and assumptions that are more resistant to future traumas. For example, a study
conducted by Tedeschi & Calhoun (2004), found that the personality variables (see Table
2.3.3) of extroversion, openness and optimism correlated with the five domains of growth. People with these three variables may be more aware of positive emotions, even in adversity; hence they are able to process the information about the divorce more effectively, producing schema change reported as post-traumatic growth. Tedeschi & Calhoun (2004) found that social networks (Table 2.3.4) also play an important role in the growth process, particularly in the area of providing new schemas related to growth and empathetic acceptance of the divorce. The cognitive processing of distressful events appears to also be aided by self-disclosure in supportive social environments such as one’s circle of family and friends and therapy groups.

Veevers (1991) identified 17 variables associated with a “stren” response to divorce. These variables are categorised as (a) demographic variables; (b) nature of the relationship with the ex-spouse; (c) attitude towards divorce; and, (d) support networks. These “strens” are summarised in Tables 2.3.1 to 2.3.4 and discussed in detail in the subsequent sections.

**Demographic Variables**

Demographic variables refer to an individual’s age, sex, length of marriage, length of time between the decision to divorce and actual termination, income, education level, gender roles and the degree of geographical mobility (see Table 2.3.1).
Table 2.3.1

Variables Associated with “Stren” Response to Divorce (Veevers, 1991)

Category 1: Demographic Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Association with Stren Response</th>
<th>Supporting Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Being relatively younger</td>
<td>Chiriboga et al. (1978); Caldwell et al. (1983); Cohen &amp; Savaya (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Being female rather than male</td>
<td>Chiriboga et al. (1978); Zeiss (1980); Albrecht (1980); Bloom &amp; Hodges (1981); Caldwell et al. (1983)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Roles</td>
<td>Having non-traditional gender and/or marital roles</td>
<td>Bloom &amp; Clement (1984); Brown et al. (1976); Chiriboga &amp; Thurnber (1980); Bair (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>Having access to adequate income and material resources</td>
<td>Albrecht (1980); Gerstel et al. (1985); Spanier &amp; Lachman (1980); Spanier &amp; Castro (1979); Pett (1982); Pett &amp; Vaughn (1986); Wang &amp; Amato (2000); Cohen &amp; Savaya (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Having higher level of education</td>
<td>Buehler et al. (1985); Propst et al. (1986); Cohen &amp; Savaya (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Marriage</td>
<td>Having a relatively shorter marriage</td>
<td>Goode (1956); Kurdek &amp; Blisk (1983)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of time between the decision to divorce and actual termination</td>
<td>Having a longer period (more than 30 days) from decision to divorce</td>
<td>Melichar &amp; Chiriboga (1988)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical Mobility</td>
<td>Being geographically mobile</td>
<td>Asher &amp; Bloom (1983); Leslie &amp; Grady (1988)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Age, Gender and Gender Roles

The literature shows that, generally, younger persons can be expected to cope with divorce better than older persons and women cope better than men (see Table 2.3.1). Although, the age factor is also related to variables such as length of marriage and the separation experience (Veevers, 1991). Bloom & Hodges (1981), in their study, found that among newly-separated couples, women reported more gains than men and the early post-separation period was far more difficult for men (see Table 2.3.1). However, an additional crucial factor affecting the adjustment of divorced women is the presence of young children (Williams & Dunne-Bryant, 2006). Although this is not mentioned as a stren factor, positive post-divorce adjustment for women is usually associated with the lack of young children. The only relevant research conducted in Singapore (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1979) suggested a non-significant trend for men to be more likely than women to say that they were happier and very successful in divorce adjustment. However, no further explanations were offered in this research study.

Gender roles in a marriage also appear to play an important part in the outcome of post-divorce adjustment (Brown et al., 1977). Individuals in a marriage with traditional gender roles, where the wife depends on the husband for instrumental tasks and financial support, and the husband on his wife for expressive tasks and emotional support, tend to fare worse when the union is terminated as both partners are deprived of the essential support. Bair (2007) also commented that women who were dependent on their ex-spouses experienced greater psychological stress in caring for themselves and completing everyday tasks such as servicing the car and completing their tax returns. Conversely, in non-traditional gender roles, where a “genderless” demand was placed on both husband and wife, both partners were able to play interchangeable roles and hence were expected to adjust better post-divorce (see Table 2.3.1).
Income and Education

Demographic variables (see Table 2.3.1) affect an individual’s access to resources, such as income, employment and social support. These resources appear to be beneficial in facilitating adaptation, and generally divorce adjustment was observed to be more difficult for individuals who have limited access to them. Post-traumatic growth is only possible if the demands of daily living are met and there is sufficient adaptation to changes ushered in by the divorce (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

According to Ryff & Singer (1996), class differences, defined in terms of education, income and occupational standing are strongly linked with well-being (see Table 2.3.1). People with higher income, who are better educated and in employment, tend to enjoy greater well-being after a divorce. However, for many women, a major stressor after divorce is the loss of financial support from their spouses, resulting in a decline in the standard of living.

As income is also associated with an individual’s education, the divorcees, especially women, who are well-educated and have satisfactory employment, and hence sufficient income, have been found to be less stressed than those who have lost both their husbands and economic resources (Pett & Vaughan, 1986; Wang & Amato, 2000). In addition, better-educated individuals often also possess better problem-solving skills and hence experience a stronger sense of control that helps in the divorce transition (Ross & Wu, 1995).

Length of Marriage and Pre-divorce Decision Period

Generally, persons who have been married for a longer period tend to experience more distress over the divorce (see Table 2.3.1). However, the measurement of the duration of marriage may not be a good indicator, as “psychological divorce” may have preceded the legal separation for some time. The duration of marriage is therefore best
determined at the point where the decision to separate is made and not when legal proceedings begin.

Melichar & Chiriboga (1988) found that women who had a short interval (less than 30 days) between the decision to divorce and the actual separation showed more symptoms of stress, tension and depression than did women who took a moderate amount of time (31-79 days). In a related vein, Veevers (1991) also found that a relatively longer period between the divorce decision and legal proceedings supported post-divorce adjustment as the longer period indicated a more thoughtful decision and hence was more congruent with the individual’s actual needs (see Table 2.3.1).

**Geographical Mobility**

Asher & Bloom (1983) found that divorced women who moved out of their marital homes tended to adjust better than those who did not. However, the opposite effect was observed for men, who found moves stressful, and this was associated with lower levels of adjustments.

**Nature of the Relationship with the Ex-spouse**

This category examines the nature of the relationship between the divorced individuals and their ex-spouses and involves the exploration of the marital distress level, degree of attachment and quality of interaction after the divorce.
Table 2.3.2

*Variables Associated with “Stren” Response to Divorce (Veevers, 1991)*

**Category 2: Nature of the Relationship with Ex-spouse**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Association with Stren Response</th>
<th>Supporting Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Marital Distress</td>
<td>Having come from a high-distress marriage (e.g. where abuse was present)</td>
<td>Singh et al. (1978); Stone (1984); Amato &amp; Hohmann-Marriott (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment</td>
<td>Having a low attachment to ex-partner</td>
<td>Berman (1988); Johnston &amp; Campbell, (1988); Munoz-Equileta (2007)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Level of Marital Distress**

According to Veevers (1991), divorce may be most traumatic for persons who perceive they have lost a “good marriage”. On the other hand, divorce may be associated with a sense of achievement and freedom for those who perceive they have survived a “bad marriage”, where there was a high level of marital distress such as verbal or physical abuse. Furthermore, longitudinal studies indicate that people who perceived more problems in their marriage tend to adjust more quickly once the marriage has ended (Aseltine & Kessler, 1993; Booth & Amato, 1991). The Singapore study (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1979) yielded a similar outcome where participants who perceived their marriages to be highly problematic expressed relief that the “worse is over” and nothing could be worse than what they had experienced during the marriage.
Attachment

Attachment can be defined as the strong bond that develops first between parent and child, and later in peer and romantic relationships (Bowlby, 1969). Marriage is a highly significant form of attachment bond that has negative consequences when broken. The effects of divorce on both the adults and children concerned tend to be highly stressful (Weiss, 1976). Kobak (1999), in reference to Weiss’ work, explained that the availability of an attachment figure in relationships is important to the strength of the bond, and when this availability is broken, the security of one spouse or the other is threatened.

Berman (1988) observed that there often exists a persisting bond between divorced persons, with some individuals continuing to experience a strong sense of longing for the estranged partner. Some divorcees experience a mix of anger and resentment along with positive feelings for the estranged spouse. Weiss (1976) explained that the long-lasting bond between spouses is similar to parental attachment. Despite the many factors that led to dissolution of the marriage, many recently-divorced people continued to experience a sense of being “drawn” to the ex-spouse, feeling a profound sense of sadness and confusion at the loss of the relationship regardless of what had existed objectively. Even after the marriage has ended, many ex-spouses continued to think or even be obsessed about one another and seek out news about each other’s activities (Ahrons, 1995).

Current understanding of these reactions has been derived from the work of Bowlby (1969, 1973a, 1973b, 1977), who highlighted that feelings of anger, contempt, regret, affection and anxiety or panic emerge when people are separated from a figure with whom they have an attachment bond. Weiss (1975) elaborated on Bowlby’s work by describing the role of attachment in the development of adult love and the continuing positive feelings experienced by many divorced people. The manifestations of these positive feelings are similar to mourning reactions (Parkes, 1973) and include recurrent
thoughts and images of the ex-spouse; attempts to contact or learn about him or her; feelings of emptiness, as if one were missing a part of oneself; loneliness and panic that occur suddenly when the ex-spouse is inaccessible; and expression of positive feelings toward the ex-spouse. Weiss (1975) argued that these responses could be understood as the “response to intolerable inaccessibility of the attachment figure” (p. 131) and labeled them “separation distress”. The ongoing positive feelings to the ex-spouse, often described as attachment or inferred as separation distress, correlate with negative adjustment in some divorced people. Brown, Felton, Whiteman, & Mancia (1980) studied separation distress by developing a measure of attachment with a population of respondents who were in the process of marital dissolution and concluded that attachment contributes significantly to difficulties in adjustment.

The work of Johnston & Campbell (1988) indicated that individuals who have difficulty separating from their spouse show one of two patterns of attachment: either (a) they continue to be intimate with their ex-spouse, experience emotional turmoil, hold on to idealized views of their former partner, and remain strongly and positively attached; or, (b) they have chronic conflict with their former spouse and maintain highly negative images and feelings. Many individuals alternate between one state and the other.

The Singaporean study conducted by the Ministry of Social Affairs (1979) revealed that reactions to divorce were closely associated with the level of emotional involvement between husband and wife at the time of marriage. Those with higher emotional involvement were more likely to feel “sad”, and less likely to feel “happy” when the divorce was finalised. This finding applied to both men and women. The above-mentioned studies provide substantial support for the belief that attachment is a significant aspect of the divorce process (Brown et al., 1980; Kitson, 1982). The marital partner, as a positive attachment figure, is a salient part of divorce and may exacerbate subjective distress (see
Table 2.3.2). Emotional resolution of this attachment seems to occur when divorcing individuals can maintain a balanced perception of the positive and negative aspects of the former spouse, accompanied by little or no emotional arousal. This resolution of attachment is associated with relief of emotional distress (Goode, 1956; Brown et al., 1980; Berman, 1985) and increased possibility of developing quality interactions with the ex-spouse.

**Satisfactory Relationships with Ex-spouse**

According to Ahron’s (1995) study, 12% of the 98 couples interviewed one year after the divorce, did not allow a failed marriage to overshadow the positive elements of a longstanding relationship. Those couples continued to trust one another, sought mutual advice and stayed connected with family and old friends. Those individuals, who are able to establish positive relationships with their ex-spouses, reported positive post-divorce adjustment (see Table 2.3.2). Cohen & Savaya (2003) suggested that an individual’s satisfaction with the divorce process and settlement affects the quality of the relationship with the ex-spouse. They found that the more acrimonious the divorce process, the more strained the relationship with the ex-spouse tended to be, and the greater the adjustment difficulties an individual may face. In summary, the nature and quality of the relationship that a divorcee has with the ex-spouse pre- and post-divorce seems to have a significant influence on an individual’s level of adjustment (see Table 2.3.2). Moreover, the variables presented in this category, if translated to “strengthening”, are constructive in facilitating the growth domain of developing warmer and more intimate relationships with others as defined by Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996).
Attitude towards Divorce

The role of initiation, the ability to perceive divorce as a normal event and personality factors all influence an individual’s attitude towards divorce. The ability to see divorce as an act of courage that may be liberating and the start of an important stage (Gettleman & Markowitz, 1972) may impact resiliency. Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996) provided further insight into personality traits predisposing to recovery from traumatic events and they further suggested that certain personality traits enable individuals to perceive beneficial outcomes after experiencing a traumatic event. They added that individuals who are more inclined to processing personal experiences are usually better able to see the “good” in adversity (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

Table 2.3.3

Variables Associated with “Stren” Response to Divorce (Veevers, 1991)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 3: Attitude towards Divorce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variable</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View Divorce as a Normal Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality Variables</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Initiation of Divorce

The literature on divorce draws a fairly clear distinction between the divorce experience of the spouse who initiates the divorce and the spouse who does not. The initiator is defined in the literature as the spouse who first proposes the divorce and is firmer in its pursuit (Buehler, 1987). Although there is a strong subjective component in the perception of initiator status, most scholars agree that the majority of divorced persons are able to identify whether they, their spouse, or both of them initiated the divorce (Buehler, Hogan, Robinson, & Levy, 1986).

Studies have shown that initiators of divorce perceive more benefits (see Table 2.3.3) to separation and are less likely to be upset by it (Pettit & Bloom, 1984; Wang & Amato, 2000). The spouses who initiated the divorce have the psychological advantage of getting what they want and they can have control of the situation to a certain extent. In addition, the initiator, more often a woman, has a time advantage to grieve and prepare for detachment. Conversely, non-initiators are placed in a more passive position, with the decision being made for them. Their immediate reactions can range from disbelief and shock, to outrage and despair (Ahrons, 1995).

The general consensus is that the divorce experience is more difficult for non-initiators than initiators (see Table 2.3.3). Non-initiators have greater difficulty accepting the divorce (Vaughn, 1986) and handling its losses (Kincaid & Caldwell, 1995) than initiators. They tend to feel victimised in a life change they either did not want or were unsure they wanted (Gray & Silver, 1990; Hagestad & Smyer, 1982), and they have little or no control over the change (Gray, 1996). However, initiators are not free from negative reactions to divorce. Weiss (1975) suggested that initiators of divorces generally feel guilty, even anguished, at the damage their departure would inflict on their children and spouse. They are more prone to anticipate the condemnation of others and to feel that
condemnation is partially deserved. Myers (1989), who studied the male experience in divorce, suggested that men who initiate divorce often feel guilty for not loving their wives and for wanting to leave them. Myers also found guilt to be particularly strong among middle-aged professional men who had left traditional marriages, in which their wives had devoted most of their adult years to being a wife, raising the children, and running the home. Emery (1994) observed that over time, the initiator’s sense of guilt tends to create a sense of responsibility and feelings of dutiful caring post-divorce.

**Viewing Divorce as a Normal Event**

Albrecht (1980) conducted a study of 500 male and female divorcees in the United States to determine divorce experience and adjustment. He observed that a third of the 500 respondents in his study perceived marriage as a permanent commitment and, consequently, divorce as the evidence of failure. The feeling of having failed contributed significantly to their stress. The extent to which divorce is seen as a crisis depends on the idea the individual has of marriage and the view that divorce is not an abnormal failure. Wang & Amato (2000) found that positive adjustment was associated with having favourable attitudes towards marital dissolution. Contrary to this, individuals who had negative attitudes towards divorce were more likely to view their own divorce as a moral failure or an abnormal event and this in turn tended to affect their post-divorce adjustment.

According to Lazarus & Folkman (1984), the experience and the impact of a stressor depend on the individual’s perception, which was shaped by culture. In Hong Kong and countries with predominantly Chinese populations, the social significance of marriage and the negative view of divorce as exceptional and shameful, led divorced women to justify their divorce. According to Wong & Chan Fok (1997), in order to avoid social disapproval for initiating divorce, many women in their study felt they had to justify their decision as one that was legitimate and non-impulsive, on the grounds that they had
no alternative but to end a marriage that had become intolerable, for the sake of their children and their own mental health.

**Personality Variables**

Personality traits which seem to be associated with post-traumatic growth include agreeableness, extroversion, discipline and orderliness, and religiosity (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). People who have an agreeable disposition are more likely to evoke supportive responses from others following trauma. Extroverts are more able to use social support. Discipline and orderliness are related to personal strength. In their study, Finkel & Jacobsen (1977) found that some people appeared to be better able to respond to crisis positively – an ability that was more person – rather than event-specific. Thomas (1982) noted that personality factors like dominance or ego-strength were important to post-divorce adjustments. Perceived control and optimism were also found to be strongly correlated to positive psychological adaptation (Thuen & Rise, 2006). Individuals with such positive personality factors also tended to engage in better self-care after divorce (Radford, Travers-Gustafson, Miller, Archevesque, Furlong & Norris, 1997).

In contrast, individuals with weak ego-strength (a sense of self that is less positive), may interweave their existing losses with earlier unresolved traumas like abortion, forced migration, severe deprivation, abuse and abandonment. Johnston & Campbell (1988) theorised that marital dissolutions could remind some people of their earlier losses and trauma, thus contributing to the greater difficulty in resolving their present loss (see Table 2.3.3). Individuals who have a low locus of control have a tendency to blame their ex-spouses for the problems they face in present day. The ex-spouse becomes a convenient excuse for their anger. Such individuals who hold on to prolonged anger are stuck in the past and are less able to move to present realities (Ahrons, 1995).
The growth domains as highlighted by Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996) are outcomes influenced by an individual’s views of and attitude towards divorce. Personality variables and role in initiating divorce have an influence on an individual’s outlook and perception of control over the divorce process; these in turn can have a positive effect on post-divorce adjustment.

Support Networks

The key social support networks that can assist with divorce adjustments include family and friends, therapeutic support groups, as well as the presence of a new significant other.

Table 2.3.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables Associated with “Stren” Response to Divorce (Veivers, 1991)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category 4: Support Networks</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variable</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic Support Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of New Significant Others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Social Networks**

The literature on stressful life events has singled out social support as a protective factor. Support from family and friends who are emotionally and physically available and non-judgmental can contribute to positive adjustment (Ginsberg, 1986; Camara, 1986; Ross, 1995). Specific family relationships and friendships (one-to-one) are important in buffering against maladjustment as they serve to limit the emotional upset of traumatic events by detecting symptoms of distress; encouraging individuals to confront trauma; move on; and providing suggestions on the resolution of the trauma-inducing conflict (Figley, 1989).

**Therapeutic Support Groups**

Beyond personal relationships, active involvement in support groups designed to facilitate the adjustment process is likely to increase the chances of positive adjustment (see Table 2.3.4) and contribute to higher levels of personal growth and self-actualisation (Beatrice, 1979).

The mutual support found in such groups can also in turn, aid in post-traumatic growth by providing a way to craft narratives about the changes that have occurred, and by offering perspectives that can be integrated into schema change (Neimeyer, 2002; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Narratives of trauma and survival are important in post-traumatic growth, because the development of these narratives forces survivors to confront questions of meaning and how it can be reconstructed (McAdams, 1993; Neimeyer, 2002).

**Presence of New Significant Others**

Individuals who maintain their social relationships or develop new social ties are likely to receive social support that is beneficial for post-divorce adjustment (see Table 2.3.4). However, of all forms of social support, a new intimate relationship may be the most useful in facilitating divorce adjustment (Wang & Amato, 2000).
One of the most important variables in the transition to single life is the presence of a supportive “significant other” who provides an alternative source of emotional, social and sexual contact. Dating someone steadily and/or re-marriage are usually taken as indicators of recovery from the divorce experience (Spanier & Lachman, 1980; Wang & Amato 2000). A new partner symbolises the substitution of an attachment figure, and marks the beginning of a new affective link signifying that emotional adjustment has been achieved (Kitson, 1982; Johnston & Campbell, 1988, Wallerstein, 1986).

**Chapter 2 Summary**

The discussion of research literature provides evidence that the conventional focus on the perspective of “divorce as a disaster” and hence a stressful experience can be alternatively viewed as an opportunity for a “growth process”. Rather than seeking simply to reduce or eliminate negative outcomes post-divorce, it is important to identify and understand the presence of positive psychological and coping mechanisms in a person’s life so as to facilitate the restoration and engagement of the positive. An individual’s resources, whether social or psychological, can moderate the amount of psychosomatic symptoms and effects of adjustment post-divorce (Pearlin, Lieberman, Menaghan, & Mullan, 1981; Wheaton, 1985). Individuals with such resources can return to post-divorce levels of functioning within two years; and through a process of cognitive engagement, they can arrive at post-traumatic growth. A thorough understanding of the variables, such as “strens”, that facilitate this process and how they can be strengthened, can lay the foundation for enhancing an individual’s capacity to engage in growth. The presence of “strens” helps to bolster one’s ability to cognitively process the divorce and develop constructive beliefs that can facilitate post-traumatic growth.
In view of these insights, this current research seeks to investigate the area of divorce experiences in Singapore, focusing on the psychological impact of divorce, possible positive post-divorce outcomes and variables contributing to post-divorce growth. The research questions and detailed research methodology employed for this study is discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

Chapter 1 provided a process-centred definition of divorce and highlighted the dual legal systems governing divorce in Singapore. It explored the local divorce trends and discussed the reasons for the consistent increase in divorce rates in the last few decades. In addition, a comparison was also made between local and international divorce trends. Chapter 2 explored the area of divorce adjustments by examining both the positive and negative psychological responses of divorce. It also identified “strens” which buffer the impact of divorce and facilitate positive adjustment. Adjustment is presented as related to possible post-traumatic growth, a process ushered in by cognitive and affective processing in the aftermath of the divorce event.

The concepts of divorce adjustment and resultant growth have been widely researched in the West, but little has been done to shed light on their relevance to the divorce experience in Singapore. The only study conducted by the Ministry of Social Affairs (1979) in Singapore showed that 90% of divorcees in its survey were able to adjust successfully from the divorce experience. However, no further study on post-divorce adjustment has been done since then in Singapore. Against this backdrop, this thesis employed both quantitative and qualitative methods, to investigate positive and negative outcomes for divorcees in Singapore.
Purpose of the Research

This research sought to provide new information on the divorce experience in Singapore by probing into the reasons for divorce, identifying indicators of a failing marriage, highlighting the initial post-divorce responses as well as the positive and negative adjustment outcomes experienced by the divorcees in the study. Emphasis is placed on identifying factors that contribute to growth as well as the indicators of growth for divorcees in Singapore. This is to suggest that clinical practice and academia augment facilitative factors and processes leading to positive growth with appropriate and relevant interventions.

Research Aims

The main aims of this thesis were two-fold. The first was to explore divorcees’ perceived reasons for their divorce and to examine the predisposing and precipitating factors that led to the divorce. The second aim was to ascertain the initial responses to the divorce and identify factors that impacted both adjustment and post-traumatic growth.

The empirical investigation comprised three distinct but interrelated components. A quantitative research method was used in Study 1 to identify reasons for marriage dissolution and indicators of marital instability; explore divorcees’ experiences; evaluate the post-divorce adjustment process; and highlight interventions for troubled marriages. A sample of 136 divorced respondents completed a self-administered questionnaire, designed to assess each of these areas. The detailed description of the questionnaire and the results are presented in Chapter 4. Study 2, which was the main study in the thesis, employed a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with 19 divorcees which explored their perceived reasons for divorce and their post-divorce adjustment experiences. The process of engaging in semi in-depth interviews with participants was a means of observing how
the 19 participants elucidated the past and presented divorce experiences. A thematic analysis was conducted on the divorcees’ accounts and narratives to capture the underlying themes of the divorce experience. The thematic analysis was conducted using the six-phased thematic analysis framework developed by Braun & Clarke (2006). Details of the methodology employed and results for Study 2 are presented in Chapter 5. Study 3 employed the same methodology as Study 2, except that the sample studied involved 12 experienced counsellors who provided inputs from their clinical experiences in working with divorced clients. The aim was to derive qualitative information that could be cross-referenced with Study 2. The findings from Study 3 are discussed at length in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

**Research Questions**

Studies 2 and 3 were extensions of Study 1 using a different methodological approach. Both the qualitative and quantitative studies had similar objectives, and addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the perceived main reasons for divorce?
2. How do divorcees adjust after a divorce in Singapore?
3. What are the positive and negative post-divorce outcomes experienced by divorcees in Singapore?
4. What factors contribute to positive and negative post-divorce adjustments?
5. Are there any interventions that divorcees and counsellors could use to salvage a troubled marriage?
6. What are the similarities and differences between counsellors and divorcees in their viewpoints on divorce and adjustment experiences?
7. Are there interventions that divorcees and counsellors could adopt to facilitate post-divorce growth?
Dual Research Methodology

Some researchers have proposed that a multi-methodological approach is vital when studying an area that is not well-understood (e.g., McLeod, 2003, Patton, 1980, Huberman & Miles, 1994). Such a design has been described as “simultaneous triangulation” (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989) or an “integrated” mixed method approach (Bazeley, 1999), where three sets of data are analysed by qualitative and quantitative methods. The objective reality of the divorce experience is difficult to capture, hence employing various types of data collection and different methods of analysis can serve as a strategy to add rigour, breadth and depth to the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The major advantages of the use of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are that they contribute complementary strengths and allow the use of triangulation which ensures an in-depth understanding of the divorcees’ experiences and counsellors’ views and perspectives. Denzin (1989) also concurred that this two-pronged method has the advantage of examining compatible findings and resolving conflicting results as each method would enable the same phenomena to be explored from different perspectives, thus providing for a better approximation of reality (Berg, 1989).

The combination of the two research methods was considered the most appropriate for this study after taking into account the aims of the study, the nature of the research questions and what is considered as acceptable in an interview without re-traumatizing the participants. Research for this thesis leans heavily on the qualitative method where face-to-face interviews were conducted with divorcees and counsellors. The findings obtained from both samples allowed cross-validation of lay participants’ subjective experiences (divorcees) with the expert perspective (marriage counsellors). This enables the study to present a more comprehensive picture of the divorcees’ experience in Singapore. Thus questions posed to the counsellors in the semi-structured interviews were similar to those
posed to the participants, except that the counsellor’s replies were derived from their clinical experiences and observations rather than their personal experiences of divorce.

**The Use of Semi-structured Face-to-face Interviews**

McLeod (2003) suggested that using face-to-face interviews could generate “sensitive qualitative data” as well as add the richness and complexity of the participants’ personal experiences. Waller (2001) further explained that this narrative approach allows the exploration of subjective experience of the divorcees and may “reveal protective factors not apparent even to participant-observer researchers” (p. 290). Braud & Anderson (1998) also commented that qualitative methodology allows the “honoring” of human experience and to verify the full human experience studied. Given the complexity and sensitive nature of divorce experiences, a semi-structured interview provides the platform to probe more deeply into relevant issues.

There has been much debate on the “subjectivity” versus “objectivity” of data obtained through interviews. Miller & Glassner (1997) asserted that although interviews might not provide the objective mirror reflection of the world, they do provide insights into the meanings people attribute to their experiences and social worlds. According to constructivism theory, interviewers and interviewees are mutually and actively engaged in constructing meanings during the interview process. However, interviewees are viewed as experiencing subjects who actively construct their authentic experiences of their social worlds (Baker, 1982). The semi-structured interviews with divorcees in this research study therefore focused on: (a) the generation of data which would give an authentic insight into the divorce and adjustment experiences; and, (b) how individuals constructed narratives of events, and in turn, construct meaning that could lead to post-traumatic growth. Through personal narration of the divorce and its aftermath participants are able to re-construct their experiences and the meanings they attached to them.
The Adoption of Grounded Theory Analysis

Grounded theory methodology was adopted in this study to explore the diverse dimensions of an individual’s divorce experience and to establish the underlying themes contributing to adjustments and growth. Grounded theory analysis is a leading and highly-documented qualitative research method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Glaser, 1992; Morse, 1994). Glaser and Strauss developed the grounded theory model in the 1960s and presented it as a simplified model involving three stages: (a) an initial attempt to develop categories which illuminate the data; (b) an attempt to ‘saturate’ these categories with many appropriate cases in order to demonstrate their relevance; and (c) development of these categories into more general analytic frameworks with relevance outside the setting. In summary, grounded theory methods consist of systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data to build middle-range theoretical frameworks that explain the collected data (Charmaz, 2000).

The grounded theory approach challenges the dominant trend of over-reliance on the quantitative testing of hypotheses, typically through numerical survey and other statistical approaches. McLeod (2007) highlighted that in grounded theory, it is important to address the issue of whether the participant can test the emerging category system rather than proceed on the basis of random or stratified sampling. He further added that the sample sizes in grounded theory studies are not large enough to make a random sampling a realistic option (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003). Typically, grounded theory research is carried out on data-sets collected from between 8 and to 20 participants. In this survey, 19 divorced individuals and 12 counsellors participated in the two separate studies. The researcher observed that by the seventeenth interview with the divorced participants, there were noticeably fewer new ideas, insights or observations arising from the participants.
McLeod (2007) commented that data collection ends when the category system or ‘theory’ is ‘saturated’.

In addition, McLeod (2003) highlighted that “one of the distinctive characteristics of the grounded theory tradition is a view that the work of analysis is best done alone...” (p. 71) and he cautioned that through the act of thorough immersion and concentration on the part of a “highly committed individual in the material can an adequate degree of theoretical ‘saturation’ be achieved” (p. 71). Hence, these 19 participants’ and 12 counsellor’s interviews were conducted by the researcher alone to ensure uniformity in the interview process and manage the quantum of variables and achieve thematic saturation. The process of systematic data coding, using thematic analysis and grounded theory is further elaborated upon in Chapter 5.

**Overview of Subsequent Chapters**

In Chapter 1, the discussion of Muslim divorce provided a comparison between divorce under the civil court and the Syariah Court and presented a picture of the unique dual divorce laws in Singapore. However, as Malay-Muslim life and divorce are guided by Islamic laws, researching Muslim divorce presents problems for empirical research. Indeed, only 15 (11%) Malay respondents could be recruited out of a total of 136 subjects for the quantitative analysis of Study 1. The qualitative Study 2 had two (11%) Muslim participants out of the total 19; and there was no access to Malay-Muslim counsellors for Study 3. As such this research analysed findings for each sample groups as a whole, without making any distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim divorces.

As mentioned earlier, the details of the three studies are presented in Chapters 4 to 6. Chapter 4 describes the survey instrument, data collection procedure, analysis of data
collected for the quantitative part of this study. Chapter 5 and 6 review the qualitative studies conducted with the 19 participants and 12 counsellors respectively.

Throughout this thesis, the terms “respondents”, “participants” and “counsellors” will be used to refer to the individuals who took part in Studies 1, 2 and 3 respectively.
CHAPTER 4

STUDY 1: QUANTITATIVE SURVEY OF DIVORCEES

A quantitative methodology was employed in Study 1 to obtain information on the nature of the experience of divorce in Singapore. The survey focused on the main research questions of the thesis namely: (a) the divorcees’ perceptions of the key reasons for the dissolution of their marriage and indicators of marital instability; (b) identifying the key experiences of the divorcees over the course of the divorce process; and, (c) identifying interventions they saw that might have helped avoid divorce.

The Survey Questionnaire

The researcher chose to adopt a specially-designed survey questionnaire for data collection, and provided the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity knowing that this would enable the divorcees to feel more at ease to re-visit issues both positive and negative as well as to respond more readily and spontaneously to the selected tool as compared to the more intrusive face-to-face interviews. The questionnaire is attached as Appendix A.

There were seven sections in the survey questionnaire. Section A of the survey focused on collecting descriptive data about the participants and the non-participating ex-spouses’ (i.e., gender, age, occupation, race, religion, education level and monthly income, housing, number of children, age of children, years of marriage). Section B provided a checklist of indicators of marital instability taken from past research (Gottman & Levenson, 2002; Amato & Previti, 2003; Conger, Wickrama & Matthews, 1996; Stanley & Markham, 1998). Participants were asked to indicate those indicators relevant to them or
add their own. Section C focused on post-divorce adjustment levels and involved participants answering a scaling question on how well they perceived they have adjusted to the divorce (1- “Still Trying to Adjust” to 10- “Very Well-Adjusted”). Section D required participants to identify the feelings, thoughts and behaviours they had experienced from a checklist (a) in the immediate aftermath of the divorce; (b) within the first six months after the divorce; and, (c) more than six months after the divorce. Sections E and F provided a checklist of possible factors contributing to positive post-divorce adjustments and possible interventions for troubled marriages. Participants were asked to indicate the relevant factors and interventions from the list or add their own.

Section G comprised the Post-traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI), a standardized measure used to assess personal growth following traumatic event (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). The PTGI is the most commonly used standardized instrument to measure growth (Helgeson et al., 2006; Taku, Cann, Calhoun, & Tedeschi, 2008). The PTGI consists of 21 items worded in the form of positive outcomes as a result of the experience of trauma. It uses a 6-point Likert response scoring system from 0, “no change experienced”, to 5 “experienced change to a very great degree”. Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996) subjected the 21 items of the PTGI to principal components analysis to reveal five interpretable factors of post-traumatic growth. The five factors were relating to others (7 items), new possibilities (5 items), personal strengths (4 items), spiritual change (2 items) and appreciation of life (3 items). The factor structure of the PTGI has been confirmed in later research and it appears to be one superordinate factor with five subordinate factors corresponding to the five dimensions (Taku et al., 2008).

The PTGI is a reliable assessment of self-reported growth (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1998a). Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996) reported high test-retest reliability ($r = .71$), high internal consistency ($\alpha = .90$) in the full scale, as well as acceptable consistency among the
separate scales ($\alpha$ ranging between .67 and .85) in a large sample of American university students ($N = 604$) who had experienced a significant negative life event. Similar results were obtained in an Australian community sample of trauma sufferers ($N = 129$) with a high internal consistency ($\alpha = .91$) and sound test-retest reliability ($r = .78$) (Bates, Trajstman, & Jackson, 2004) and in a sample of 35 mothers grieving the death of their child, with high internal consistency in the full scale ($\alpha = .96$; Riley et al., 2007). The PTGI was also used in a sample of 102 German survivors of motor vehicle accidents (Zoellner et al., 2008). Cronbach’s alpha for PTGI Total was .93, and ranged from .71 to .88 for the separate subscales (New Possibilities.84, Relating to Others.88, Appreciation of Life.71, Personal Strength.83, Spiritual Change.86).

In terms of concurrent and discriminant validity, Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996) showed that the PTGI was not related to social desirability but was significantly positively correlated with optimism ($r = .23, p < .01$), religiosity ($r = .25, p < .01$), extraversion ($r = .29, p < .01$), openness ($r = .21, p < .01$), agreeableness ($r = .18, p < .01$), and conscientiousness ($r = .16, p < .01$) based on the NEO Personality Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1985). In their investigation of the construct validity of the PTGI, Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996) compared participants who had been exposed to traumatic events to others who had not experienced trauma. Results showed that people who were exposed to trauma scored higher than their counterparts on all PTGI subscales except the Spiritual Changes subscale. This supports the theory that traumatic events provide the opportunity for positive changes.
Recruitment of Participants and Data Collection

The questionnaire was administered to divorcees residing in Singapore. Copies of the questionnaire, each accompanied by an information sheet providing (a) the rationale for the research; (b) an assurance of confidentiality and anonymity; and, (c) the contact information of the researcher and her supervisors (see Appendix B) were posted to counsellors and counselling interns who had agreed to assist with recruitment for the study. The counsellors then identified potential participants from amongst their clients and provided them with the information sheet. If, after reading the information sheet, a client was interested in participating he or she was provided with the survey questionnaire and a reply-paid envelope. On completion, questionnaires were posted back to the researcher.

The 280 questionnaires distributed to potential participants, 144 (51.4%) were returned by post. However, eight returns were deemed void as the handwriting could not be deciphered, leaving a total sample of 136 participants. Of these, two participants did not indicate their gender. Many participants did not provide personal accounts to illustrate their personal experiences despite these being requested. This limited analysis of these accounts but did not invalidate quantitative analysis.

Description of the Sample

Gender and Age at Divorce

A total of 136 respondents participated in the survey. The sample comprised 45 men (33%), 89 women (65%), and two who did not indicate their gender. The mean age of the respondents was 42.3 years (Female mean = 41.52; Male mean = 43.87). Approximately half the sample (52%) came from the 30 to 44 years age group (see Table
The men ranged in age from 26 to 65 and the women from 24 to 70. The 2007 figures on divorces granted under the Singapore Woman’s Charter indicate that 59% of male divorcees and 58.2% of the female divorcees were between the age of 30 and 44. Muslim divorces for the same age-group stood at 53% for men and 50% for women. Thus, this sample reflects the national statistics for divorce in terms of age.

**Table 4.1**

**Distribution of Divorcees by Age Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 25-29</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 30-34</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 35-39</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 40-44</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 45-49</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 50-54</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 55-59</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 60 and over</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nil response</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N=136*

**Duration of Marriage and Decision Time Taken for Actual Divorce**

**Length of Marriage before Divorce**

The average duration of the respondents’ marriages was 12 years (see Table 4.2). The duration of marriage ranged from less than one year to 29 years for men and from one year to 38 years for women.
Table 4.2

**Length of Marriage before Divorce**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men (42)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>12.04</td>
<td>8.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women (83)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>12.01</td>
<td>7.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nil response (9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (N=134)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>12.02</td>
<td>7.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only two individuals were able to obtain a divorce within a year of marriage. Such incidents are rare in Singapore because the Women’s Charter stipulates that an application for a divorce cannot be filed within the first three years of marriage except under exceptional grounds as explained in Chapter 1.

Divorce studies in countries such as the United States of America and England have identified the first three years of marriage as the most “dangerous” period, after which the likelihood of divorce declines as the marriage duration becomes longer. Clarke (1995) mentioned that half of the marriages that end up in divorce had lasted for less than seven years. This pattern of divorce in Western marriages is quite different from the Singaporean median length of marriages of 13 years (Subordinate Courts Research Bulletin, 2003) which is evident in the present sample. Thus, the average length of 12.02 years in this sample reflects a national trend for marital break-ups to occur increasingly in the later years, perhaps after couples have performed their responsibility of bringing up their children. (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2008).
Duration of Time Taken to Decide on Commencing Divorce Proceedings

Table 4.3 indicates that, on average, male respondents took about 29.4 months while female respondents took approximately 31.5 months to consider the divorce before commencing proceedings.

Table 4.3
Duration of Time Taken between Making Decision and Actual Divorce

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men (43)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>132.0</td>
<td>29.41</td>
<td>28.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women (85)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>240.0</td>
<td>31.45</td>
<td>33.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nil Response= (6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (N=134)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>240.0</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the present sample, on average, men and women took approximately two and a half years to contemplate the divorce. There was no difference between the genders in the average length of time taken from the decision to the divorce ($t(126) = .34, p = .78$). However, for both genders there was considerable variability in the length of time taken given the range of one month to 20 years. This considerably long period of time taken suggests that the divorce was not decided on hastily.
Ethnicity and Religion

Ethnicity

As shown in Table 4.4 the sample was drawn from various ethnic groups. Although most of the respondents were Chinese (61%), followed by Indians (20%), this sample is slightly different from the ethnic distribution in Singapore, where Malays rather than Indians make up the second largest ethnic group. According to the Women’s Charter (2007), there were 5,051 divorces in 2007. Chinese accounted for 4,213 divorces (83%), Indians 345 divorces (7%), Other Ethnicity 42 divorces (0.8%) and Inter-Ethnic Group 440 divorces (9%) of all marital dissolutions. However, the Women’s Charter figures did not include Malay divorces; which came under Muslim law.

Table 4.4

Distribution of Divorces by Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>61.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nil response</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=136

Religious Beliefs

Closely linked to ethnic distribution, are the religious beliefs held by respondents. While 47 respondents (35% of the sample) were Christians/Protestants and Catholics; 27 (20%) were Buddhists/Taoists; and Muslim respondents comprised 20 (15%). Another 6 (4%) indicated as “Others” and 4 (3%) did not respond to the question (see Table 4.5).
Table 4.5

**Distribution of Divorcees by Religion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic/Christianity/Protestants</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism/Taoism</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not follow any religion</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nil response</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=136

**Education, Occupations, Income and Housing**

**Educational Level and Occupation**

The respondents were relatively well educated. Ninety-five percent of them had completed at least ten years of formal school education or the equivalent of the GCE “O” Levels and only 4% had primary school education (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6

**Distribution of Divorcees by Educational Level**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational level</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secondary ('O' Level)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polytechnic (Diploma)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior College &amp; Pre-University('A' Level)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nil response</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=136
**Occupation**

In the Singapore job market, a person’s educational qualifications tend to determine his or her skills and thus the kind of job this person may obtain (Quah, 1994). Therefore, as shown in (Table 4.7), a very large proportion of the respondents, as a result of their academic training, held professional occupations. Most respondents were in full-time employment (see Table 4.7) and almost half (48%) were Professionals, Managers, Executives or Technicians (PMETS).

**Table 4.7**

**Distribution of Divorcees by Occupation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative &amp; Managerial</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Workers</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Workers</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales &amp; Marketing</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering &amp; Technical</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Services</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nil response</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(N=136\)

**Average Monthly Income**

Approximately 33% of the sample was drawn from the higher social-economic group, with earnings of at least S$4,000 (Singapore dollars) per month. The median monthly household income among all resident households is S$4,950 in 2008. (The Department of Statistics, 2008).
Table 4.8

**Distribution of Divorcees by Average Monthly Income**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average income S$</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Above $5,000</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below $5,000</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below $4,000</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below $3,000</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below $2,000</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below $1,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No income</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nil Response</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=136

**Types of Housing**

Table 4.9 shows that some 71% of the respondents indicated that they lived in public housing built by the Housing and Development Board (HDB Standard flats and Executive flats). Another, 24% lived in private apartments, condominiums and terrace houses. In Singapore, some 85% Singapore residents live in public housing (Yuen, 2007), as a group, the respondents in this sample had slightly greater property asset values than the average Singaporean.

Table 4.9

**Distribution of Divorcees by Types of Housing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of housing</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HDB Standard and Executive Flats</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Apartments/Condominiums</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrace houses</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nil response</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=136
Distribution of Divorcees by Number of Children

It is commonly perceived that children are a deterrent to divorce, as couples who have children generally stay in a marriage “for the children’s sake” (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1979). The findings of this study indicate that 70% of the respondents had at least one child at the time of the divorce, with 44% having two children or more (see Table 4.10). Divorcees having two children (38%) formed the largest proportion of this sample. It would appear that having children in the family did not prevent divorce presumably because there are other compelling reasons for one or both parties to separate. Since couples are usually granted joint custody of the children, the well-being of the children may not be as great an obstacle as it was in 1979.

Table 4.10

Percentage Distribution of Divorcees by Number of Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 child</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 child</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 children</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 children</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 children</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nil response</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=136

Summary of Details of the Survey Sample

In summary, the research sample comprised more women than men, with women making up two-thirds of the sample. The sample broadly reflected the national statistics for divorce in terms of age, ethnicity and religion. However, the representation of ethnic
Malays and people of the Muslim religion was somewhat lower than in the Singapore population. On average, people had taken about two-and-a-half years to divorce from the time of their decision although there was considerable variability. Comparison of education, employment, housing and income indicated that the sample was generally well educated and almost half were employed in PMET positions. As a function of this, most people had better than average income and housing arrangements. Finally most of the respondents had children, with the largest proportion being those with two children.

**Marital Instability**

*Most Common Indicators of Marital Instability*

Respondents were asked to select from a list of indicators of marital stability those factors that had contributed to marital instability in their case. The five most commonly selected indicators were (a) frequent quarrels; (b) lack of communication; (c) personality differences; (d) loss of trust; and, (e) unreasonable behaviours (see Table 4.11). There were three significant gender differences on the factors reported by respondents as indicators of marital instability. Chi-Square analyses showed that a lower than expected proportion of women reported nagging and complaining relative to men ($\chi^2 (1, N = 134) = 5.20, p < .05$). In contrast, higher proportions of women than men reported nagging and complaining ($\chi^2 (1, N = 134) = 9.20, p < .01$) and irresponsibility ($\chi^2 = (1, N = 134) = 7.59, p < .01$) as significant factors affecting their marriages (see Table 4.11). This emphasis on factors affecting the quality of the relationship differs from past findings. In similar research, Wong & Kuo (1983) listed the five main problems in a marriage as infidelity, followed by behaviour problems, personality problems, financial problems and problems with in-laws.
Table 4.11

**Most Common Indicators of Marital Instability**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Men N=45</th>
<th>Men %</th>
<th>Women N=89</th>
<th>Women %</th>
<th>Total N=134</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequent quarrels</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of communication</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>53.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality differences</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>50.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of trust</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>47.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreasonable behavior</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>44.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of love</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal and emotional abuse**</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>40.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagging/complaining*</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irresponsibility**</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* *p*<0.05   ** *p*<0.01   *** *p*<0.001

**Less Common Indicators of Marital Instability**

The ten indicators listed in Table 4.12 were less commonly selected. For all but one indicator (jealousy), the proportion of female endorsement outweighed male endorsement. However, none of the comparisons were significant in chi-square analysis.
Table 4.12

*Less Common Indicators of Marital Instability*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absence from marital home</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial problem</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrequent sexual relation</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifference</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritability</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolate from spouse social circle</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate maintenance</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jealousy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambling/alcoholism etc.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* *p*<0.05 **p*<0.01 ***p*<0.001

**Personal Examples of Events Leading to the Actual Divorce**

Respondents were asked to nominate what they saw as the main factor leading to the divorce and to provide an event to illustrate this factor. Their free responses were grouped according to the issues identified and the proportions of each factor are presented in Table 4.13 for men and for women. The numbers of people nominating each factor who believed that their marriage could have been saved by some intervention are also tabulated in Table 4.13.
Table 4.13

Main Indicator: Specific Personal Examples that Led to the Actual Divorce (N=129)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Indicators mentioned and examples given</th>
<th>Main Indicators cited by Respondents in their personal accounts</th>
<th>Interventions to Save Marriages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men (%)</td>
<td>Women (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adultery</td>
<td>9 (7%)</td>
<td>23 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Problems</td>
<td>9 (7%)</td>
<td>9 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of love</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of trust</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-laws problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts with step children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>8 (6%)</td>
<td>9 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent quarrels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife threw tantrums</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desertion</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
<td>11 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving matrimonial home for long periods of time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking out on family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long periods of separation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompatibility</td>
<td>8 (6%)</td>
<td>4 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different educational background</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference in personality and character</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different religious background</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuse</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional/physical/sexual/verbal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
<td>7 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not providing for family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambled away assets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not providing enough to make ends meet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.13 continued

Main Indicator: Specific Personal Examples that Led to the Actual Divorce (N=129)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Indicators mentioned and examples given</th>
<th>Main Indicators cited by Respondents in their personal accounts</th>
<th>Interventions to Save Marriages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men (%)</td>
<td>Women (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No consummation</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>4 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No mood for sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband passed on STD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcoholism</td>
<td>5 (4%)</td>
<td>8 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wants to gain independence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locked out of marital home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife forbidden to work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projecting stress on daughter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Nil Response=5

As shown in Table 4.13 the highest indicator cited in the personal accounts was adultery (25% of total sample) with a higher proportion of women indicating that it was adultery that led to the actual divorce than men. This was followed by relationship problems (14%) and communication problems (13%). These three factors accounted for 52% of the events identified by the participants. The present findings are contrary to the officially stated reasons for divorce – Desertion/Unreasonable Behavior (48%) and Living Apart/Separation (48%) (see Chapter 1 Figure 6). This contradiction is partially explained by the fact that the reason for divorce is presented publicly in court. It is likely that divorcing couples prefer a smooth and trouble-free divorce, without having to air their embarrassing private life to the court. The citing of less dramatic reasons for dissolution of marriage (separation and unreasonable behavior) may be inflated in the court system as
these are less contentious issues less embarrassing to both parties. However, from the
respondents’ reports, it would seem that the quality of their emotional and sexual
relationship plays a crucial role in divorce. Thus intimacy and communication, or the lack
of it, appear to be the most important reasons for divorce in Singapore.

Interestingly for each type of event a substantial proportion of people still believed
that some sort of intervention might have saved the marriage. Notably, for the most
frequently cited event of adultery, 34% indicated that they felt that an intervention could
have helped while 22% were unsure. Thus, the divorcees in the main did believe in the
possibility that interventions could help to avert divorce. The nature of intervention is
returned to later in this chapter.

**Post-divorce Negative Reactions by Gender**

The respondents’ recollections of their negative responses to the experience of
divorce were assessed at three time points: after filing for divorce, in the first six months
after divorce and in the period after six months. For each time period participants
indicated their feelings, thoughts and behaviours. These retrospective reactions were
analysed in two ways. First, the total numbers of items indicated were analysed and
gender differences and time point differences identified. In the second section specific
feelings, thoughts and behaviours were compared for men and women at each time point.

Total scores for feelings, thoughts and behaviours were analysed with a two-way
mixed design Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Gender was used as a between subjects
factor (male vs. female) and time point was a within subjects factor (After filing for
divorce vs. In the first six months after divorce vs. The period after six months). Means
and standard deviations are presented in Table 4.14.
Table 4.14

Mean Ratings of Negative Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviours by Time Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>T1: Immediately After Filing for Divorce Mean &amp; SD</th>
<th>First 6 months After Divorce Mean &amp; SD</th>
<th>6 months or longer after Divorce Mean &amp; SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mean &amp; SD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.67 (2.48)</td>
<td>2.16 (2.38)</td>
<td>1.07 (1.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>3.67 (2.48)</td>
<td>2.16 (2.38)</td>
<td>1.07 (1.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>5.34 (3.97)</td>
<td>4.11 (4.09)</td>
<td>1.90 (2.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughts</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2.00 (2.05)</td>
<td>1.02 (1.46)</td>
<td>0.42 (1.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>2.83 (2.14)</td>
<td>1.99 (2.18)</td>
<td>0.72 (1.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviours</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2.38 (2.35)</td>
<td>1.11 (1.65)</td>
<td>0.38 (0.86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>3.18 (2.67)</td>
<td>1.89 (2.18)</td>
<td>0.48 (0.94)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the analysis of numbers of negative feelings, ANOVA showed a significant main effect for gender ($F(1,132) = 8.00, p < .01$) and for time ($F(2,264) = 72.28, p < .001$) but no interaction ($F(2,264) = 2.70, p = .07$). Consideration of the simple main effects for the time factor main effect showed that the number of negative feelings was significantly lower at each time point. The main effect for gender showed that women scored significantly higher than men. Thus, while the gap between men and women decreased over time it remained significant (see Table 4.14).

A similar pattern of results was evident for negative thoughts with ANOVA yielding a significant main effect for gender ($F(1,132) = 8.39, p < .05$) and time point ($F(2,264) = 68.47, p < .001$) but no interaction ($F(2,264)= 2.52, p = .08$). Thus, negative cognitive experiences declined significantly at each time point but remained significantly higher for women than for men.
The final analysis of negative behavioural responses replicated the findings for negative feelings and cognitions. Once more there were significant main effects for gender \( (F(1,132) = 4.06, p < .05) \) and for time point \( (F(2,264) = 73.07, p < .001) \) but no interaction \( (F(2,264) = 2.15, p = .13) \). Thus, negative behaviours declined significantly at each time point but remained significantly higher for women than for men.

**Comparison of Endorsed Feelings, Thoughts and Behaviours by Time Period**

This section reports the specific thoughts, feelings and behaviours identified by the male and female respondents for the three time periods.

**Specific Negative Feelings by Gender Immediately after Filing for Divorce**

The respondents reported experiencing a range of feelings in the immediate aftermath of filing for a divorce. The predominant negative feelings experienced by both male and female respondents post-divorce included sadness (66%), worry (49%), tension (46%), moodiness (43%), restlessness (40%) and fearfulness (40%) (see Table 4.15).

Gender differences were evident on four of the emotions. Women reported a higher incidence than men of the emotions of: fearfulness \( (\chi^2 = (1, N=134) = 27.78, p < .001) \), grief \( (\chi^2 = (1, N=134) = 8.02, p < .01) \), worry \( (\chi^2 = (1, N=134) = 6.25, p < .05) \) and anxiety \( (\chi^2 = (1, N=134) = 5.33, p < .05) \). Thus overall the female divorcees reported more of emotional suffering at this point than men.
Table 4.15

Specific Negative Feelings by Gender Immediately after Filing for Divorce

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Feelings</th>
<th>Immediately After Filing for Divorce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>27 (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried**</td>
<td>15 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tense</td>
<td>17 (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moody</td>
<td>17 (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful***</td>
<td>4 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restless</td>
<td>18 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious*</td>
<td>11 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grieving**</td>
<td>9 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritable</td>
<td>16 (36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopeless</td>
<td>11 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilty</td>
<td>12 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lethargic</td>
<td>8 (18%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * p<0.05       ** p<0.01      *** p<0.001

Feelings by Gender Within Six Months after Divorce

As shown in Table 4.16, there was a general decline in the proportions of both men and women endorsing specific negative emotions six months after their divorce. The emotions experienced by divorcees are therefore not static and can improve over time.

Interestingly, most of the gender differences in negative emotions present at the time of the divorce remained evident six months after divorce. The female divorcees remained more fearful ($\chi^2 = (1,N=134) = 15.69, p<.001$), worried ($\chi^2 = (1,N=134) = 23.76, p<.001$), and anxious ($\chi^2 = (1,N=134) = 8.56, p<.01$) than the male divorcees. However, female divorcees at six months after the divorce were now more tense than the male divorcees ($\chi^2 = (1,N=134) = 4.03, p<.05$), but were no longer significantly higher on feelings of grief than the men.
### Table 4.16

**Reports of Negative Feelings by Gender Within Six Months after Divorce**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Feelings</th>
<th>Within 6 Months After Divorce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men N (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>20 (45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moody</td>
<td>16 (36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried***</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful***</td>
<td>3 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilty</td>
<td>9 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tense**</td>
<td>7 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious**</td>
<td>5 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restless</td>
<td>10 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopeless</td>
<td>7 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grieving</td>
<td>5 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritable</td>
<td>9 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lethargic</td>
<td>4 (9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: * p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001

**Negative Feelings by Gender (Six Months or Longer after Divorce)**

At the third time interval negative feelings were again lower for both men and women. However, once more, there were gender differences on worry ($\chi^2 = (1,N=134) = 9.95, p<.001$) and tension ($\chi^2 = (1,N=134) = 5.29, p<.05$) with women showing higher proportions than men on each of these emotions. Fewer men reported experiencing negative emotions, although a substantial number (20%) still continued to experience sadness (see Table 4.17). Sadness was also the most highly endorsed feeling among the women (26%).
Table 4.17

**Reports of Negative Feelings by Gender Six Months or Longer after Divorce**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Feelings</th>
<th>6 Months or Longer after Divorce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N(%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>9 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried***</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moody</td>
<td>6 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tense*</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restless**</td>
<td>6 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful</td>
<td>4 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious</td>
<td>4 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilty</td>
<td>6 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grieving</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritable</td>
<td>3 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopeless</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lethargic</td>
<td>3 (7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * p<0.05  ** p<0.01  *** p<0.001

**Specific Negative Thoughts by Gender Immediately after Filing for Divorce**

Table 4.18 summarises the negative thoughts that divorcees reported post-divorce. Both male and female divorcees reported viewing themselves negatively, and therefore, suffered a loss of self-esteem. Overall, women tended to have more negative thoughts than men and this difference was significant on the items of “thinking you cannot make decisions” ($\chi^2 = (1,N=134) = 6.76, p<.01$) and “thinking you cannot cope” ($\chi^2 = (1,N=134) = 5.12, p<.05$) (Table 4.18).
Table 4.18

*Reports of Negative Thoughts by Gender Immediately after Filing for Divorce*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Thoughts</th>
<th>Immediately after Filing for Divorce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Rumination</td>
<td>22 (49%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative view of self</td>
<td>19 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking can't cope*</td>
<td>14 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worrisome thought repeatedly</td>
<td>15 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking can't make decision**</td>
<td>9 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative view of the world</td>
<td>11 (24%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* *p* < 0.05  ** *p* < 0.01  *** *p* < 0.001

*Negative Thoughts by Gender Within Six Months after Divorce*

Table 4.19 shows that both male and female respondents reported that their negative thinking had decreased substantially six months after divorce. However, during the first six months after divorce, women still reported more negative thoughts than men and the gender difference remained significant for the items of “thinking you cannot make decisions” (χ² = (1, N=134) = 10.39, p<.001) and “thinking you cannot cope” (χ² = (1, N=134) = 9.92, p<.01). For men their highest proportions of negative thoughts were in the categories of “negative views of self” and “negative rumination”. However, for women, the highest proportions of negative thoughts were in “thinking you cannot cope”, “negative views of self” (both 37%) and “negative rumination” (36%).
### Table 4.19

**Reports of Negative Thoughts by Gender Within Six Months After Divorce**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Thoughts</th>
<th>Within 6 Months After Divorce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative view of self</td>
<td>12 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative rumination</td>
<td>12 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking can't cope**</td>
<td>5 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative view of the world</td>
<td>8 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worrisome thought repeatedly</td>
<td>7 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking can't make decision***</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: * $p<0.05$  ** $p<0.01$  *** $p<0.001$

### Negative Thoughts by Gender Six Months or Longer After Divorce

Table 4.20 shows that both genders reported further reductions in the six categories of negative thoughts six months or longer since the divorce. The proportion of male divorcees having negative thoughts fell to less than 10% for all categories except rumination (18%). Although the women tended to be a little higher on all indicators except rumination there were no significant gender differences at this stage on any of the cognitive indicators.
Table 4.20

*Reports of Negative Thoughts by Gender Six Months or Longer after Divorce*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Thoughts</th>
<th>6 Months or Longer After Divorce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Rumination</td>
<td>8 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative view of self</td>
<td>4 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative view of the world</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worrisome thought repeatedly</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking can't cope</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking can't make decision</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Rumination</td>
<td>12 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative view of self</td>
<td>15 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative view of the world</td>
<td>11 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worrisome thought repeatedly</td>
<td>10 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking can't cope</td>
<td>9 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking can't make decision</td>
<td>7 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Rumination</td>
<td>20 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative view of self</td>
<td>19 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative view of the world</td>
<td>13 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worrisome thought repeatedly</td>
<td>12 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking can't cope</td>
<td>11 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking can't make decision</td>
<td>8 (6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Negative Behaviour by Gender Immediately after Filing for Divorce*

The most endorsed items of negative behaviour at the time of filing for divorce were: (a) crying (51%); (b) withdrawal (48%); (c) difficulty in concentrating; (42%) and, (d) loss of interest in past activities (40%) (see Table 4.21). There were significant gender differences on crying ($\chi^2 = (1, N=134) = 25.63, p<.001$), susceptibility to illness ($\chi^2 = (1, N=134) = 5.51, p<.05$) and other negative experiences ($\chi^2 = (1, N=134) = 4.79, p<.05$) with women scoring higher than men on all three indicators. The most common negative behavioural indicator amongst men was withdrawal (42%).
Table 4.21

Reports of Negative Behaviour by Gender Immediately after Filing for Divorce

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Behaviour</th>
<th>Immediately After Filing for Divorce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crying***</td>
<td>9 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>19 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in concentrating on the task</td>
<td>17 (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of interest in past activity</td>
<td>17 (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in planning ahead</td>
<td>17 (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting agitated way</td>
<td>14 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in daily routine</td>
<td>12 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susceptibility to illness*</td>
<td>5 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other negative experiences*</td>
<td>4 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting aggressive way</td>
<td>8 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State other behaviour not listed</td>
<td>5 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting abusive way</td>
<td>4 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsive shopping</td>
<td>3 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-harm</td>
<td>3 (7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

Negative Behaviour by Gender Within Six Months after Divorce

Six months after divorce, the highest proportions of negative behaviour in women were in crying (36%), loss of interest in past activities (36%) withdrawal (31%) and difficulty planning ahead (30%). In contrast, fewer men reported exhibiting troubled behaviours (listed in Table 4.22) in the first six months after divorce with the highest proportion indicating withdrawal (22%). The gender difference remained significant for crying ($\chi^2 = (1,N=134) = 9.23, p<.001$), susceptibility to illness ($\chi^2 = (1,N=134) = 4.70, p<.05$). Women were now higher than men on loss of interest in past activities ($\chi^2 = (1,N=134) = 4.72, p<.05$) with women scoring higher on all three indicators.
**Table 4.22**

*Reports of Negative Behaviour by Gender Within Six Months after Divorce*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Behaviour</th>
<th>Within 6 Months After Divorce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of interest in past activity*</td>
<td>8 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>10 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crying**</td>
<td>5 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in planning ahead</td>
<td>7 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting agitated way</td>
<td>8 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in concentrating on the tasks</td>
<td>7 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susceptibility to illness*</td>
<td>3 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in daily routine</td>
<td>6 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other experiences</td>
<td>4 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting aggressive way</td>
<td>3 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsive shopping</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting abusive way</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State other behaviour not listed</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-harm</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* *p*<0.05 **p*<0.01 ***p*<0.001

**Negative Behaviour by Gender Six Months or Longer after Divorce**

Table 4.23 shows that the divorcees adjusted behaviourally six months after the divorce. The reported incidences of negative behaviours dropped to insubstantial levels. No significant gender differences remained on the variables. Reports in three key areas – crying, withdrawal, and loss of interest in past activities remained relatively higher than the rest, especially for women.
Table 4.23

*Reports of Negative Behaviour by Gender Six Months or Longer after Divorce*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Behaviour</th>
<th>6 Months or Longer After Divorce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crying</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>4 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other experiences</td>
<td>4 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of interest in past activity</td>
<td>3 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting agitated way</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in planning ahead</td>
<td>4 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State other behaviour not listed</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susceptibility to illness</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in daily routine</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in concentrating on the tasks</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-harm</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsive shopping</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting aggressive way</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Substance Misuse, Sleep and Eating Disorders by Gender after Filing for Divorce*

Table 4.24 compares male and female divorcees’ reports of misuse of substance and sleep and eating disorders in the period after filing for divorce. More men in comparison to women coped with the immediate aftermath of divorce by drinking alcohol ($\chi^2 = (1,N=134) = 4.06, p<.05$) and smoking ($\chi^2 = (1,N=134) = 7.32, p<.01$). This is in line with the general perception that men tend to resort to substance misuse more than women. Women reported having more problems with disrupted sleep, although this was not significant. Women also reported higher frequencies of eating problems, with loss of appetite bordering on significance ($\chi^2 = (1,N=134) = 3.73, p<.053$). As shown in Table 4.24, more than half of the women (52%) reported having disrupted sleep and 34% had difficulty in falling asleep. Forty-four percent of the women experienced loss of appetite.
Unfortunately respondents did not indicate the use of substances within the time period of the first six months after the divorce and in the time period after that. This may have been a design fault of the questionnaire which did not clearly indicate the need to provide ratings for the three time periods similar to those for feelings, thoughts and behaviours. Analysis of substance abuse can therefore only be reliably considered for the first time period of immediately after filing for divorce.

Table 4.24  
Reports of Substance Misuse, Sleep and Eating Disorders by Gender after Filing for Divorce

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men N=45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep problem – Disrupted sleep</td>
<td>16 (36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing eating pattern - Loss of appetite</td>
<td>12 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep problem – Unable to sleep</td>
<td>15 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep problem – Unable to maintain sleep</td>
<td>8 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misuse of substances – Alcohol *</td>
<td>16 (36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing eating pattern - Take high caloric food</td>
<td>5 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misuse of substances – Cigarettes **</td>
<td>15 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misuse of substances – Medication</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing eating pattern - Frequent binging</td>
<td>4 (9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: * p<0.05   ** p<0.01

Positive Adjustment After Divorce

Table 4.25 shows the list of strens identified as helpful for divorce adjustments. The men and women identified the following as key strens: (a) not viewing divorce as a personal failure (69%); and (b) having a supportive social network (57%). This supports
the view that positive adjustment is related to how well the person is able to reframe the divorce as a constructive event. In addition, both men and women reported higher percentages of endorsement for having personality factors of resourcefulness and a sense of control (51%), being the initiator of the divorce (46%) and having moved out of the marital home (41%).

Significant gender differences were identified for the positive strens. Higher proportions of women than men endorsed having a non-traditional gender role ($\chi^2(1,N=134)=13.68,p<.001$); having supportive peers ($\chi^2(1,N=134)=15.09,p<.01$); having strong religious beliefs ($\chi^2(1,N=134)=6.61,p<.01$); being relatively young at the time of the divorce ($\chi^2(1,N=134)=4.79,p<.05$) and being the initiators of the divorce ($\chi^2(1,N=134)=4.45,p<.05$). In contrast, a higher proportion of men than women endorsed having a new relationship ($\chi^2(1,N=134)=6.89,p<.01$).
Table 4.25

Factors contributing to Positive Adjustment after Divorce

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Adjustment</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not viewing divorce as a personal failure</td>
<td>35 (78%)</td>
<td>58 (65%)</td>
<td>93 (69%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship having supportive peers***</td>
<td>15 (33%)</td>
<td>61 (69%)</td>
<td>76 (57%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality factors (resourcefulness, sense of control)</td>
<td>20 (44%)</td>
<td>49 (55%)</td>
<td>69 (51%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being the initiator of the divorce</td>
<td>16 (36%)</td>
<td>46 (52%)</td>
<td>62 (46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having moved out of the marital home</td>
<td>18 (40%)</td>
<td>37 (42%)</td>
<td>55 (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time-having a longer decision period before the divorce</td>
<td>16 (36%)</td>
<td>34 (38%)</td>
<td>50 (37%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship – having a low-level of attachment</td>
<td>19 (42%)</td>
<td>29 (33%)</td>
<td>48 (36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having undergone an agreeable divorce settlement</td>
<td>20 (44%)</td>
<td>26 (29%)</td>
<td>46 (34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having non-traditional gender role***</td>
<td>5 (11%)</td>
<td>38 (43%)</td>
<td>43 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having sufficient income after the divorce</td>
<td>12 (27%)</td>
<td>31 (35%)</td>
<td>43 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having strong religious belief (s)**</td>
<td>7 (16%)</td>
<td>33 (37%)</td>
<td>40 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship – having a new relationship*</td>
<td>20 (44%)</td>
<td>20 (22%)</td>
<td>40 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time-having a shorter duration of marriage</td>
<td>14 (31%)</td>
<td>16 (18%)</td>
<td>30 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having access to counselling services or therapy</td>
<td>7 (16%)</td>
<td>23 (26%)</td>
<td>30 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatively young at time of divorce*</td>
<td>4 (9%)</td>
<td>22 (25%)</td>
<td>26 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a high level of education</td>
<td>6 (13%)</td>
<td>17 (19%)</td>
<td>23 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship – having pos relationship w/ex-spouse</td>
<td>9 (20%)</td>
<td>14 (16%)</td>
<td>23 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coming from an abusive marriage</td>
<td>3 (7%)</td>
<td>17 (19%)</td>
<td>20 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others (please specify)</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
<td>8 (9%)</td>
<td>10 (7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 134

Note: *p<0.05  **p<0.01  *** p<0.001

Positive Divorce Outcomes

There was an overwhelmingly positive response to the question of “Were there positive outcomes brought to your life following the divorce?”. Of 134 respondents to this question 114 (85%) answered Yes, 16 (12%) were unsure and only 4 (3%) answered No. A chi-square analysis confirmed this as a significant difference $\chi^2(2,N=134)=163.05, p<.0001$. In addition, there was no gender difference on the experience of positive outcomes, with similar proportions of men endorsing positive outcomes (77.8%) relative to
women (88.8%) ($\chi^2(2, N=134)=2.84, p=.24$). For the 134 who answered the subsequent question of how they experienced a positive outcome (79; 59.0%) answered in the first 12 months which was significantly higher than more than 12 months afterwards (39; 29.1%) and not sure (12; 9.0%). Chi-square analysis also confirmed this as a significant difference ($\chi^2(2, N=134)=45.21, p<.0001$). Once more there was no gender difference on this factor ($\chi^2(2, N=134)=1.59, p=.451$).

Key positive outcomes reported by individuals post-divorce include: (a) feeling happier (64%), (b) gaining more independence (61%); and, (c) having more peace and quiet (57%). Having fewer quarrels (51%) and having a more positive outlook towards life (53%) were also among the more highly endorsed items. These outcomes may have resulted from fewer conflicts (fewer quarrels: 51%) experienced by respondents in their daily lives (see Table 4.26). The positive outcome of gaining independence was experienced by a higher proportion of women than men ($\chi^2(1, N=134)=4.45, p<.05$) (see Table 4.26). In addition, women endorsed “no longer afraid” significantly more than men ($\chi^2(1, N=134)=9.95, p<.01$).
Table 4.26

**Positive Divorce Outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Divorce Outcome</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling happier and being at ease</td>
<td>29 (64%)</td>
<td>57 (64%)</td>
<td>86 (64%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater independence*</td>
<td>23 (51%)</td>
<td>59 (66%)</td>
<td>82 (61%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace and quiet gained</td>
<td>27 (60%)</td>
<td>50 (56%)</td>
<td>77 (57%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a more positive outlook towards life</td>
<td>24 (53%)</td>
<td>47 (53%)</td>
<td>71 (53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer quarrels</td>
<td>22 (49%)</td>
<td>46 (52%)</td>
<td>68 (51%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial freedom</td>
<td>14 (31%)</td>
<td>37 (42%)</td>
<td>51 (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding love again</td>
<td>19 (42%)</td>
<td>24 (27%)</td>
<td>43 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No longer afraid**</td>
<td>6 (13%)</td>
<td>34 (38%)</td>
<td>40 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No longer ashamed</td>
<td>9 (20%)</td>
<td>23 (26%)</td>
<td>32 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Positive Outcome</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
<td>20 (22%)</td>
<td>21 (16%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Predictors of Post-traumatic Adjustment

Pearson product moment correlations and multiple regression was used to explore the predictors of post-divorce adjustment. A person’s level of self-reported adjustment was determined by their score on the single item measure of adjustment which required a ranking from 1 ‘still trying to adjust’ to 10 ‘very well adjusted’. Prior to these analyses the scores of men and women were compared to establish whether there was any gender difference in level of adjustment that might require separate regression analysis. No significant difference was found between the men and women in their level of adjustment (Male mean = 6.69; SD = 2.65; Female mean = 6.64; SD = 2.45) $t$ (129) = .106, $p = .916$.

Pearson correlation conducted for the descriptive measures of gender, education level, income, length of marriage and number of children were found to have little or no
correlation with the adjustment rating ($r$’s ranged from -.077 to .04). However, age had a modest positive correlation with adjustment ($r = .17, p < .05$).

Composite measures of negative reactions to divorce in terms of feelings, thoughts and behaviours were created by taking the average of the person’s score at each rating time (immediately after filing for divorce, in first six months after divorce; and more than 6 months after divorce). These composite scores correlated modestly with adjustment ratings: feelings, $r = -.325, p < .01$; thoughts, $r = -.229, p < .05$. behaviours, $r = .331, p < .01)$. The measure of post traumatic growth was also modestly correlated with adjustment. For Total scores on the PTGI, the correlation was .229 and the subscale correlations ranged from $r = .195$ (relating to others) to $r = .327$ (new possibilities).

A multiple regression was conducted including each of the variables that were significantly correlated with adjustment ratings as independent variables. This regression was significant and accounted for 31% of the variance in adjustment scores ($R^2 = .311; F (5,89) = 8.03, p < .001$). The multiple regression is summarized as Table 4.27.

**Summary of Multiple Regression of Variables Predicting Post-divorce Adjustment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>T value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.122</td>
<td>1.345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>-.379</td>
<td>.132</td>
<td>-.472</td>
<td>-2.872**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughts</td>
<td>.212</td>
<td>.278</td>
<td>.133</td>
<td>.764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviours</td>
<td>-.228</td>
<td>.269</td>
<td>-.148</td>
<td>-0.849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTGI Total</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.267</td>
<td>3.015**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. ** $p < .01$

As shown in Table 4.27, the two significant predictors of post-divorce adjustment were negative feelings over the three time periods which was a negatively weighted
predictor and the total score on the PTGI which was a positive predictor. The multiple regression was repeated with only the two significant predictors entered into the equation. These two variables were found to account for 29% of the variance in post-divorce adjustment ($R^2 = .289; F(2,92) = 18.67, p < .001$) and both independent variables remained significant predictors (both $p$'s < .01). A hierarchical regression was conducted with the composite negative feelings variable entered at step 1 and the total PTGI score entered at step 2 and this is summarized in Table 4.28. Both steps of the regression were significant. On its own, the negative feelings variable was found to account for 22% of the variance in post-divorce adjustment scores ($R^2 = .215, F(1,93) = 25.54, p < .000!$). Addition of the total PTGI score at stage 2 increased the prediction by 7% to 29% and this change was significant. This indicates that PTGI total scores made an independent contribution to the prediction of post-divorce adjustment scores beyond the levels of negative feelings ($R^2$ (change) = .073; $F(1,92)$= 9.467, $p < .01$).

Table 4.28

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>T value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>-.373</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td>-.464</td>
<td>5.05***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>-.392</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>-.488</td>
<td>5.526***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTGI Total</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.272</td>
<td>3.077**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given that the PTGI total was a significant predictor of post-divorce adjustment, and that each of the subscales of PTGI was also significantly correlated with adjustment, the multiple regressions were repeated substituting the subscale scores for the total PTGI
score to explore whether specific aspects of PTG were more important in predicting adjustment. This regression was significant and accounted for 35% of the variance in adjustment scores ($R^2 = .311; F (6, 88) = 7.73, p < .001$). The multiple regression is summarized in Table 4.29. As shown in Table 4.29, the two significant predictors of post-divorce adjustment were negative feelings over the three time periods which was a negatively weighted predictor and the score on the PTGI subscale of Seeing New Possibilities which was a positive predictor.

Table 4.29

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>T value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>-.398</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>-.495</td>
<td>-5.614***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating to others</td>
<td>-.439</td>
<td>.305</td>
<td>-.204</td>
<td>-1.440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New possibilities</td>
<td>.963.228</td>
<td>.367</td>
<td>.424</td>
<td>2.621**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Strengths</td>
<td>-.099</td>
<td>.389</td>
<td>-.041</td>
<td>-0.255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Change</td>
<td>.204</td>
<td>.227</td>
<td>.113</td>
<td>0.900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation of Life</td>
<td>.056</td>
<td>.325</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>0.172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Once more, the multiple regression was repeated with only the two significant predictors entered into the equation. These two variables were found to account for 26% of the variance in post-divorce adjustment ($R^2 = .262; F (2, 106) = 18.81, p < .001$) and both independent variables remained significant predictors (both $p$’s < .001). A hierarchical regression was conducted with the composite negative feelings variable entered at step 1 and the New Possibilities subscale of the PTGI score entered at step 2 and this is summarized in Table 4.30. Both steps of the regression were significant. On its
own, the negative feelings variable was found to account for 12% of the variance in post-divorce adjustment scores ($R^2 = .125$, $F (1,107) = 15.217$, $p < .000!$). Addition of the New Possibilities subscale of the PTGI score at stage 2 increased the prediction by 14% to 26% and this change was significant indicating that the new possibilities subscale of the PTGI made an independent contribution to the prediction of post-divorce adjustment scores beyond the levels of negative feelings ($R^2 (change) = .137$; $F (1,106)=19.746$, $p < .001$).

As no other subscales of the PTGI were significant predictors it appears that the capacity to see new possibilities was the key aspect of post-traumatic growth contributing to positive post-divorce adjustment in the divorcee sample.

Table 4.30

Summary of Hierarchical Regression of Negative Feelings and PTGI Subscale New Possibilities as Predictors of Post-divorce Adjustment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>T value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>-.285</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>-.353</td>
<td>3.90***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>-.320</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>-.396</td>
<td>4.719***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTGI Total</td>
<td>.825</td>
<td>.186</td>
<td>.373</td>
<td>4.444***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *** $p < .001$  PTGI = Post traumatic Growth Inventory

Interventions to Save Marriages

In response to the direct question of whether in their view any intervention could be taken to save their marriage, 63 people (46.3%) said Yes and 25 (18.4%) were unsure whereas 46 (33.8%) said No. These proportions were significantly different from
expectations. Thus, a higher proportion than expected indicated that something could be done to save their marriage and a lower than expected proportion was unsure ($\chi^2(2, N = 134) = 16.22, p < .001$). A comparison of men and women showed no gender difference ($\chi^2(2, N = 134) = .66, p = .72$).

Participants also completed a checklist of possible interventions that might have helped save in their marriage. The proportions for men and women and the total sample are listed in Table 4.31. As is shown in the table the most commonly-endorsed items were to improve communication and dialogue (35.82%); seek marital counselling (31.34%) and to learn to be more accepting in managing differences (25.37%). A series of $\chi^2$ analyses were conducted to explore the possibility of gender differences on any of the items, but all were non-significant. Thus, the men and women did not differ in their endorsement of any of the items. In combination with the material presented earlier on events that led to the divorce, it would seem that this sample of divorcees believed that interventions aimed at improving dialogue and communication, acceptance of differences together with formal help in counselling would generally be valuable in saving marriages in general.
### Table 4.31

**Interventions for Troubled Marriages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Male (N=45)</th>
<th>Female (N=89)</th>
<th>Total (N=134)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve communication and dialogue</td>
<td>18 (40.00%)</td>
<td>30 (33.71%)</td>
<td>48 (35.82%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek marital counselling</td>
<td>14 (31.11%)</td>
<td>28 (31.46%)</td>
<td>42 (31.34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn to be more accepting in managing differences</td>
<td>12 (26.67%)</td>
<td>22 (24.72%)</td>
<td>34 (25.37%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be supportive and respectful</td>
<td>9  (20.00%)</td>
<td>14 (15.73%)</td>
<td>23 (17.16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss money concerns openly</td>
<td>6  (13.33%)</td>
<td>16 (17.98%)</td>
<td>22 (16.42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have regular couple outings and vacations</td>
<td>5  (11.11%)</td>
<td>17 (19.10%)</td>
<td>22 (16.42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn to balance work and family life</td>
<td>9  (20.00%)</td>
<td>10 (11.24%)</td>
<td>19 (14.18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid arguing over trivial matters</td>
<td>7  (15.56%)</td>
<td>12 (13.48%)</td>
<td>19 (14.18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be less controlling and imposing</td>
<td>6  (13.33%)</td>
<td>12 (13.48%)</td>
<td>18 (13.43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend courses and seminars on relationships</td>
<td>7  (15.56%)</td>
<td>11 (12.36%)</td>
<td>18 (13.43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss parenting styles with goal of being effective parents</td>
<td>6  (13.33%)</td>
<td>10 (11.24%)</td>
<td>16 (11.94%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get along with in-laws</td>
<td>8  (17.78%)</td>
<td>8  (8.99%)</td>
<td>16 (11.94%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn down invitations that can lead to misunderstanding</td>
<td>7  (15.56%)</td>
<td>8  (8.99%)</td>
<td>15 (11.19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce stress at work and at home</td>
<td>8  (17.78%)</td>
<td>7  (7.87%)</td>
<td>15 (11.19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss sexual issues openly</td>
<td>4  (8.89%)</td>
<td>9  (10.11%)</td>
<td>13 (9.70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remember important occasions</td>
<td>4  (8.89%)</td>
<td>2  (2.25%)</td>
<td>6  (4.48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2  (4.44%)</td>
<td>10 (11.24%)</td>
<td>12 (8.96%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

The analysis of the quantitative survey data identified clear patterns of response to divorce and adjustment among the male and female divorcees. Overall, the participants identified communication and intimacy problems as the key factors leading to their divorce. In terms of their responses to divorce a consistent decline was apparent the experience of negative feelings, thoughts and behaviours over time with women endorsing significantly higher levels of each type of negative reaction. The comparison of negative feelings indicated that, while sadness and worry were the most heavily endorsed, feelings over time there were gender differences on specific negative feelings that changed somewhat over time. At the time of the divorce, women were higher on fearfulness, grief, worry and anxiety. Six months later they were higher on fearfulness, worry, anxiety and tension and after six months higher on worry, tension and restlessness. For thoughts negative rumination was the most frequently endorsed type of problematic thought over time and women showed higher levels of problems with making decisions and thinking they cannot cope up to six months post divorce. In terms of behaviours crying, withdrawal and loss of interest in past behaviours remained relatively higher than other problematic behaviours after six months from the time of the divorce.

Other key findings from the quantitative study relate to adjustment and positive outcomes. There was a strong endorsement of positive factors coming from the divorce. Not viewing the divorce as a failure and having positive social networks were viewed as important in positive adjustment for both men and women. Interestingly, women identified other contributors to positive adjustment as having a non-traditional gender role, having strong religious beliefs, being relatively young and being the initiator of the divorce more often than men whereas more men identified having a new relationship. Key positive outcomes related to feeling happier, having more peace and quiet and fewer quarrels and a
more positive outlook to life. Women also nominated having greater independence and
being no longer afraid as beneficial outcomes. When predictors of post-divorce adjustment
was analyzed it emerged that adjustment was significantly predicted by lower levels of
negative feelings over the course of adjustment to divorce and the experience of post-
traumatic growth, in particular the aspect of seeing new possibilities. Finally only 33.8%
of the sample felt that no intervention could have saved their marriage and large numbers
indicated that improvement in communication of counselling could have been helpful.
CHAPTER 5

STUDY 2: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS WITH DIVORCEES

Part A: Introduction

This chapter focuses on the qualitative findings of Study 2, based on data collected from semi-structured interviews with 19 divorced participants. The broad aims of this part of the research were to (a) elicit the participants’ reasons for divorce from their perspectives through their personal narrations; (b) explain their post-divorce adjustment experiences; and, (c) explore the participants’ suggestions for any interventions that could be useful for salvaging troubled marriages and achieving post-divorce growth.

In view of the large amount of data analysed in relation to the seven research questions, the chapter is divided into six sections. Part A elaborates on the preparation for the interviews, data collection and thematic analysis; Part B examines the participants’ reflections on the main reasons for their divorce; Part C explores the initial outcomes of post-divorce adjustment; Part D examines the indicators of post-divorce adjustment; Part E brings the focus of analysis to the factors that contributed to positive and negative post-divorce adjustments and growth; and, Part F examines participants’ views on interventions and that might have helped save their marriages.

The data presented in Parts B to F were derived from the participants’ narratives reflecting their individual perspectives and insights into their own experiences. This study identifies the main themes and sub-themes emerging from the interviews, using a thematic analysis. Brief verbatim excerpts of their personal narratives are included throughout to illustrate the themes and sub-themes as well as give a flavour of the richness of the qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews with the divorcees.
Quotations, when included, are intended to capture the authentic voices of the participants and reflect the wide range of individual experiences and perceptions embedded in their stories. As English is not the mother tongue of the participants, these verbatim excerpts often contain errors of grammar and clumsiness of syntax that have been left unedited to preserve their authenticity. In this thesis, whenever a participant is quoted to illustrate a theme or sub-theme, the quote is introduced in the manner of the following example:

Anna, Participant Number 1 (Woman, Aged 41).

The terms “positive” and “negative” are frequently used in this thesis when describing indicators, responses and factors. These terms do not denote any sense of judgment or moral superiority on the part of the participants or researcher, but are used as a way to distinguish between types of adjustment that may or may not result in a greater sense of well-being and ability to cope with life after divorce. From Part C onwards the suffixes (+) a plus sign and (-) a minus sign are used to distinguish between positive and negative categories, themes and sub-themes respectively.

5.1 Development of Interview Questions

In preparing the questions to guide the interviews, the researcher drew upon her 28 years of clinical experience as a counsellor to design the seven core questions. The views of the primary supervisor and the researcher’s local supervision panel, including the late Mr Anthony Yeo, a highly-respected therapist in the counselling profession with more than 35 years of clinical experience, were then sought on the suitability of these questions, including the wording. The questions were crafted in a way that would be easily understandable to any participant with a working grasp of the English Language, or who has attended an English medium school for seven to eight years.
5.2 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in which one male and one female divorcee volunteered to participate in the semi-structured interviews to test the soundness of the draft interview questions. The aims of the pilot study were (a) to gain a sense of the volunteers’ experience of the interviews; (b) to ensure that the seven questions would flow in a logical sequence; (c) to confirm that the words and language used in the interview were clear and easy to understand; and, (d) to ascertain whether the form of the questions was suitable to elicit the kind of data required for this study. After transcribing these pilot interviews verbatim, the researcher then discussed the responses with the primary supervisor of this thesis and modified some of the questions before commencing to interview the 19 participants. Some of the modifications suggested were the use of probing questions to facilitate understanding of the events that participants shared in their responses and to end the interview by specifically asking the participant: “Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your divorce that you have not said?”

On the basis of the pilot study, a final set of seven questions to be used for the semi-structured interviews was drawn up. These are listed here together with examples of the probes used in the interviews, in Table 5.1.
**Table 5.1**

*List of Questions for the Semi-structured Interview with Divorcees*

1. In this interview, I would like to ask you to think what were some factors that brought about the divorce?

   (Probes were used to identify specific events that had led to the decision. Examples of probes used are given below.)

   **Probe:** “You mentioned that you knew for a long time that he had many affairs and could you share one specific personal example or event that led to your decision to divorce him?”

2. In your opinion, how well do you think you have adjusted to the divorce?

   **Probe:** “You said that you were able to adjust well. Using a scale from 1 to 10 with 1 being “still trying to adjust” and 10 being “very well adjusted” where would you place yourself on this scale?”

3. Looking back, what were

   (a) the unhelpful or negative outcomes or consequences that you faced immediately after you filed for divorce?

   **Probe:** “You have talked about the shame and embarrassment at work after you filed for divorce and I am wondering how did it affect your work life?”

   (b) the positive outcomes or consequences that you faced immediately after you filed for divorce?

   **Probe:** “You said that there was no more quarrelling about the kids, and were there any other issues with regard to the custody of your children?”

4. Were there

   (a) negative outcomes after the divorce was finalised?

   **Probe:** “You talked about financial issues; I am wondering if there were any other problems?”

   (b) positive outcomes after the divorce were finalised?

   **Probe:** “You said that your mother-in-law was no longer invading your life. How did that help you to adjust after the divorce was finalized?”
List of Questions for the Semi-structured Interview with Divorcees

5. Were there things you or others did that you thought were helpful in getting you through the adjustment period?

**Probe:** “You mentioned that your mother was very supportive and she encouraged you to join her church activities. How did doing this help you to get through your divorce?”

6. Looking back, do you think there was anything you could have done to save your marriage?

**Probe:** “You mentioned that counselling could have salvaged the marriage and that you went for two sessions. So could you share what happened that led you to decide not to continue to go for counselling?”

7. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your divorce that you have not said?

5.3 Recruitment of Participants

Counselling professionals and counselling interns assisted in the identifying of possible participants for the interviews, and they provided valuable assistance to the researcher by assessing the readiness and willingness of individuals to participate in the study. These professionals were also sent information via e-mail and informed that should they find someone who was interested in participating in the interview, they could contact the researcher either via e-mail or telephone. Potential participants were then informed of the aims, scope and importance of the research topic through an “Information Sheet” given to them by the counsellors. (Appendix A).

5.4 Description of the Selected Participants

Initially, a total of twenty divorcees had agreed to be interviewed but at the very last minute, one of them had to be re-located to another country for work-related matters
and eventually, only 19 divorcees were available to be interviewed for Study 2. These divorcees had not previously participated in either the earlier quantitative survey (Study 1) or the pilot study. The sample comprised individuals who had been granted divorce in Singapore, and included both Muslim \( (n=2) \) and non-Muslim divorcees \( (n=17) \) under the Syariah law (1966) and the Women’s Charter (1961) respectively. Among the participants, there were five men and 14 women. The sample was broadly representative of the Singapore adult population at large. The three major races, Chinese, Malay and Indian, and the four major religions, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism, were all included, representing the multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition of Singapore society. In terms of the racial composition, the sample approximates the percentage breakdown of the general population. There were two Malays and four Indians, these two groups making up almost a third (32%) of the sample, while the 13 Chinese participants made up the remaining two-thirds (68%) of the sample. The sample also included inter-ethnic marriages \( (n=3) \) and both amicable \( (n=2) \) and acrimonious divorces \( (n=17) \).

The details of the 19 participants’ age, gender, race, religion, occupation, education level, number of children, age at marriage, years married, age at divorce, and marital status at the time of the interviews are presented in Table 5.2.
Table 5.2

Summary Details of the 19 Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Spouse’s Race</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>No. of Children</th>
<th>Age at Marriage</th>
<th>Years Married</th>
<th>Age at Divorce</th>
<th>Current Age</th>
<th>Current Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Anna F</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Designer</td>
<td>“O” Level</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Betty F</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Remarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chitra F</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Remarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dalina F</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>“O” Level</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Eileen F</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Felicia F</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>“O” Level</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Gopal* M</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Helen F</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Iris F</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Jenny* F</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Freelance</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Katherine F</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Latif* M</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>“O” Level</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Mahesh M</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Remarried</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Nancy F</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>“O” Level</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Oscar** M</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Penny F</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>“O” Level</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Queenie F</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>“O” Level</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Rajiv M</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Pastor</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Susan F</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *Inter-ethnic Marriage  **4th Divorce (shared divorce experience based on last marriage)
Briefly, 12 (63%) of the participants, including five Christians (26%) and three Roman Catholics (16%), professed a religious faith. In addition, there were one Buddhist (5%); one Hindu (5%) and two Muslims (11%) participants. Seven participants (37%) did not profess any religion. Only one out of the 19 was not in paid employment and two are retirees. All the rest came from the ranks of Professionals, Managers, Executives and Technicians (PMETs). All the participants had completed secondary school. Eleven of them, or slightly more than half of the group, (58%) had a tertiary education. The marriage age of nine participants, or nearly half (47%) of them, was between 20 and 25 years old; five (26%) between 26 and 30; and four (21%) between 31 and 35. As reflected in the general statistics on divorce in Singapore, 10 or (53%) came from the 31-40 age groups at the time of divorce. The majority of the participants, 15 (79%), were still single at the time of the interview and only four (21%) had remarried.

In reporting the interview data in this thesis, all 19 divorcees have been given pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity. The pseudonyms were then numbered according to alphabetical order to facilitate tracking the quotes from each participant throughout the thesis. Malay and Indian participants were assigned corresponding ethnic pseudonyms while the Chinese participants were given English names for easier reference. The list of participants’ pseudonyms, assigned serial number, gender, age and other brief information at the time of interview is provided in Table 5.2.

5.5 Interview Procedure

Each participant was interviewed once individually. The interviews took place over a period of five months from September 2008 to January 2009. From the beginning, the participants were told that the interviews would be audio-taped and informed of (a) their rights to withdrawal from the study at any time; and, (b) confidentiality and
anonymity of the study (See Appendix B). Participants were also told that the audio-tapes would be transcribed in full immediately after the interviews. Permission was obtained from them to clarify the data via phone calls or through e-mail in the event that the recordings were unclear.

5.5.1 Interview Setting

All the interviews were conducted on the premises of the Executive Counselling and Training Academy, Singapore which are private premises owned in part by the researcher. Accessibility and reliability of data were optimized because the setting for the semi-structured interviews was very private and the participants were aware that the researcher is an established psychotherapist in Singapore. The participants were able to see the Academy as a place where professional counselling education, training and services were carried out, and also as a place where confidentiality was strictly adhered to. Many of the participants on their own accord would switch off their personal mobile phones to ensure that the interview would not be interrupted.

5.5.2 Duration of Interviews

On average, each interview took between 45 and 55 minutes. After completion, the researcher spent an additional 20 to 30 minutes to debrief each participant in order to assess any possibility of distress as a result of the narration of divorce experiences. However, the researcher did not encounter any participant who appeared distressed after the interview and no one reported any psychological or emotional stress.

5.5.3 Conduct of the Interviews

At the outset of the interview phase, the researcher recognized that the participants were the “experts” on their experiences and therefore conducted the interviews in an attitude of respectful listening and engagement, guiding each participant through the seven questions without trying to influence the quality of the responses and reflections. During
each interview, the researcher worked on putting the participant at ease and establishing trust through empathy and non-judgment. The participants were given time to gather and express their thoughts and emotions spontaneously without fear of judgement and rejection. Through gentle and systematic inquiry as well as attuning to their feelings, thoughts and non-verbal behaviours, the researcher was able to help the participants shed their inhibitions in talking about their divorce experiences. In the process, the researcher noticed that some participants were able to discover and articulate thoughts and emotions which they said they had hitherto not expressed to anyone. Except for two cases, the participants were observed to be at ease, informal and open during the interview, doing their best to give as much information as possible to help the researcher "understand" their divorce experiences.

Although the list of questions and issues was used as a guide, the interviews were conducted in a conversation-like manner, with the researcher taking the role of a listener and confidante. As much as possible the questions were asked in the sequence shown in Table 5.1. However, a flexible approach was adopted to allow for deviations from the format so as not to interrupt the participants’ train of thought. Besides encouraging the participants to speak freely, the researcher also noted their nuances of tone, gestures, facial expressions and body language. In particular, she paid close attention to the participants’ mood and emotions. However, while both male and female participants generally had no hesitation in describing their divorce experiences in detail regardless of whether the divorce was recent or happened many years ago, two participants were able to give only brief responses. In these cases, the researcher opted not to probe further, recognising in their reluctance to elaborate, a need to have their privacy respected.

Throughout the conversations, the researcher took great care to avoid making her own assumptions, interpreting the participants’ responses or asking leading questions
based on pre-conceived notions. Although the researcher was interested in identifying positive aspects of the experience of divorce, care was taken to avoid priming participants for positive responses. Questions were asked in a deliberately neutral and broad manner, inviting participants to speak about any outcomes of their divorces.

5.6 Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality was one of the key ethical issues addressed in this study. Written assurance was given to every participant to inform them that their responses would be kept confidential. Each participant was informed in advance of the taping of interviews and guaranteed anonymity. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw their participation at any time during the interview. They then signed a consent form to participate in the research before they were interviewed (Appendix C).

As mentioned, any possibility of distressing the client in the process of the interview was also addressed. The de-briefing sessions conducted at the end of each interview provided the researcher with the opportunity to identify any residual strong emotions and assess any need for follow-up counselling.

5.7 Avoidance of Role Conflict

The researcher maintained a clear separation between her roles as counsellor and researcher to avoid any role conflict. She made sure that none of her personal clients was involved in the research project. In the interviews she encountered two participants who kept revisiting archaic information and wanted validation from her. In these cases, the researcher refrained from commenting on their marriages or offering any opinion. The researcher was also continually alert to the possibility that some participants might require
counselling support after the interviews, and was fully prepared to refer any such participants to other professionals in the community. However, the need did not arise.

5.8 Avoidance of Gender Bias

Riessman (1987) cautioned that a female interviewer’s allegiance to women’s culture with its norms of empathy and subjectivity may result in a biased conversation leading to the misconstruction of the participants’ meaning or a break-down in the interview process. The researcher took this insight into consideration and sought to avoid these possible pitfalls by ensuring that there was constant self-monitoring of her own verbal and non-verbal communication as well as possible gender prejudices during the interviews. To remain objective, the researcher reflected continually on her thoughts, feelings and behaviours. She made it a point to stay focused on the issues presented and responded to the participants from their individual paradigms and perspectives. Where necessary, the researcher consulted her primary supervisor and local adjunct supervisors to ensure clarity and objectivity in her approach.

5.9 Validity of the Verbal Responses

When obtaining information from verbal responses on divorce adjustment issues, the researcher was confronted with the serious question of whether such responses were valid and reliable. McLeod (2003) commented that the concept of validity and reliability developed for use in quantitative research cannot be applied in the same way in qualitative studies. Lincoln & Guba (1989) agreed that qualitative research should be judged on the basis of their “trustworthiness”. They observed that researchers face the possibility that the participants might not be accurate in the sharing of the truth. Yet, the fact that people might not always share the truth does not necessarily mean that their intention was to deceive, if
by lying is meant a deliberate attempt at deception. In addition, it is acknowledged that people’s perspectives, feelings and beliefs often change in different situations and over time. Thus, even so-called objective incidents (such as the reasons for divorce) are subjectively perceived, so that in the end there might not be a single truth, only changing perceptions and reconstructions (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). The researcher felt this to be the case as she reflected on what the participants reported about their failed marriages: it appeared that their beliefs, feelings, perceptions and perspectives had undergone change over time as they reconstructed their stories. The argument is brought one step further by Bogdan & Taylor (1975) who posited that even if the participant had deliberately attempted not to tell the truth, the subject matter of that deception was also important. The researcher therefore adopted this interpretative stance toward data collection and analysis in recognising that facts become significant not because they exist, but because of the way they are perceived by the participants.

5.10 Data Capturing

Immediately following the completion of each interview, the researcher recorded short notes, including impressions of the participants and comments about the flow of the interview, that were used later to facilitate data analysis. Soon after the interview, the audio session was transcribed verbatim, with some omission of non-verbal utterances (like “um”, “man”, “lah” and “ah”) and fillers (“you know”). All transcription work was personally and solely carried out by the researcher, over a total of 186 hours, to preserve the participants’ anonymity.
5.11 Data Analysis Based on Grounded Theory and Thematic Analysis

Data analysis began immediately after the interview phase and lasted from February to May 2009. Consistent with grounded theory methodology, data collection was revisited continually throughout the period to facilitate the construction of conceptually rich theory. Holloway & Todres (2003) postulated that qualitative approaches are “incredibly diverse, complex and nuanced” (p. 345) and they suggested that thematic analysis could be a foundational method for qualitative analysis.

The main reason the researcher chose thematic analysis was its flexibility in dealing with complex qualitative data. While appreciating such an advantage, the researcher sought to ensure the methodological soundness of its application. This was done by applying the six-phased thematic analysis framework developed by Braun & Clarke (2006) for identifying, analyzing and reporting themes within data. Table 5.3 reproduces these six phases of thematic analysis that the researcher used as a model for analyzing data.
**Table 5.3**

*Phases of Thematic Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description of the Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>Familiarizing yourself with your data:</em></td>
<td>Transcribing data, reading the data and noting down initial ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <em>Generating initial codes:</em></td>
<td>Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <em>Searching for themes:</em></td>
<td>Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <em>Reviewing themes:</em></td>
<td>Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <em>Defining and naming themes:</em></td>
<td>Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. <em>Producing the report:</em></td>
<td>Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back to the research question and literature; producing a report of the analysis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Braun & Clarke, 2006, page 87*

After transcribing the interviews, the researcher spent three months analyzing and examining the data, followed by the coding of preliminary ideas, identification of patterns and the search for themes. Extensive notes were made throughout the process, and this facilitated the formal coding process. A list of initial codes was then generated based on the semantic content and meaningful broad groups. The coding was data-driven and done manually. Table 5.4 provides an example of how coding was applied.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Extract</th>
<th>Coded for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“It’s too difficult trying to salvage this marriage and how much must I endure his affairs with women and be emotionally abused.”</td>
<td>1. Emotional Trauma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Adultery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Emotional Abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Salvage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher coded the extracts of data from the 19 participants under as many different themes and sub-themes as appropriate. The codes assigned were continually reviewed and refined as more data were analysed, with the aim of delineating more comprehensive and relevant thematic groupings as discussed by Bryman (2001). Eventually, from this coding, two main categories of factors were identified for Part B of this study. These are (a) predisposing factors leading to divorce; and, (b) precipitating factors that actually triggered action to initiate divorce proceedings. Within each category, specific themes were identified, based on the data analysed. These themes were in turn further analysed to develop sub-themes.

The use of a thematic map as a visual representation helped to sort the different codes into themes and clarify the relationship between each main category and its themes and sub-themes (Braun & Wilkinson, 2003). See Figures 5.1 and 5.2 showing examples of initial thematic maps with many themes and sub-themes.
During the continual process of coding, identifying themes and sub-themes, considering new data and redefining and refining themes and sub-themes, it became evident to the researcher that some themes earlier identified were not really themes as they encompassed only one or two codes. Often this led to redefining the theme and identifying new sub-themes. On the other hand, sometimes the initial themes identified were too broad and needed subsequent refinement. For example, what was initially categorized under the theme, “Religious Conflict”, was reviewed after further analysis and a new theme was created, “Unresolved Dispute over Religious Differences”, given the data collected. The

*Figure 5.1.* Initial Thematic Map showing Five Main Themes in Braun & Wilkinson’s Format
greatest satisfaction of thematic analysis at this stage was in capturing the contours of the coded data and forming an accurate and satisfying “thematic map representation” according to Braun & Clarke’s (2006) model. The researcher stopped further recoding when she recognized that it was not adding anything substantial to the themes. The researcher then organised the themes and sub-themes in thematic maps, as shown in the example below. (See Figure 5.2).

**Figure 5.2.** Final Thematic Map showing the Predisposing Factors and a set of 8 Themes and 5 Examples of Sub-themes

A detailed analysis was now possible as themes were more organized and coherent and the researcher was able to identify the ‘story’ that each theme told and consider its relation to the broader overall picture and the research question(s). Further refinement was
applied to identify sub-themes within the themes, particularly when working with large and complex themes. One example would be when the researcher was examining the main theme “Financial Issues”. Under this theme the following sub-themes identified were husband’s failure to provide financially, insufficient dower, lack of money, differences in spending habits, and wife’s greater career success.

The final phase revealed the emergence of a set of main categories encompassing fully-worked-out themes and sub-themes. This was followed by making a final analysis and writing up the report. A similar process was undertaken to identify themes and sub-themes for Parts C and D of this study.

**Part B: Reasons for Divorce**

Part B explores the pre-divorce challenges identified by the 19 participants. Arising from this, two types of factors, predisposing and precipitating, were categorised as the reasons for divorce. Predisposing factors were defined as the set of conditions that the participant believed caused the marriage to break down, while what eventually triggered the divorce proceedings were the precipitating factors. This Part also examines the interrelation of these two factors. The themes identified with regard to the marital problems experienced by the divorcees are based on the divorcees’ own reports, that is, problems as perceived by the divorcees themselves.

**Section 1: Predisposing Factors – Leading to Divorce**

This section addresses the predisposing themes and sub-themes derived from the qualitative analytical process. Many of the themes encompassed overlapping constructs of discussion in the 19 participants’ narratives and contextual expression of personal experiences and post-adjustment life events. The eight key themes were communication
issues, financial issues, abusive behaviours; family issues, incompatibility issues, spending time together, weak foundation in love, and spouse’s mental illness. These predisposing factors are tabulated in Table 5.5 for both women and men. The themes are presented from highest to lowest frequency of coding among women and men combined. There are also 30 sub-themes identified in this section.
Table 5.5

Section 1: Predisposing Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>1.1 Communication Issues</th>
<th>1.2 Financial Issues</th>
<th>1.3 Abusive Behaviours</th>
<th>1.4 Family Issues</th>
<th>1.5 Incompatibility Issues</th>
<th>1.6 Issues on Spending Time Together</th>
<th>1.7 Weak Foundation in Love</th>
<th>1.8 Spouse’s Mental Illness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female Participants (14)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Anna</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Betty</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Chitra</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Dalina</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Eileen</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Felicia</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Helen</td>
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<td>X</td>
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Theme 1.1: Communication Issues

Table 5.5 shows that the most common reason given by the 19 participants for their marriage ending centred on communication and financial problems. Communication breakdown, usually an underlying cause of divorce, was mentioned as a cause of divorce by six female and three male participants (1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13 & 18). These impasses refer to either a complete withdrawal or a futile attempt at interaction which instead led to conflict. The absence of communication for a prolonged period would finally lead to emotional strains and physical separation. Several types of communication breakdowns were experienced by the participants and three sub-themes were categorised: communication impasses, non-truthful communication, and absence of communication. Communication impasses also include arguing and not listening and ignoring each other’s communication. Some studies have found that a higher proportion of women than men mention problems related to communication issues (Gigy & Kelly, 1992). This was found to be the case in this study.

Sub-theme 1.1.1: Non-truthful Communication

Mahesh felt his marriage had deteriorated from a lack of openness or honesty on his part. He described how he had mismanaged communications with his wife and in-laws, explaining why he chose to deliberately lie to them.

Mahesh, Participant Number 13 (Man, Aged 53)

“Forstly I have to accept responsibility. I was not having good communication with my ex-wife and in-laws. I find myself lying because I knew from past experience that if I told the truth to their family they would become emotional and critical of my behaviour.”

Sub-theme 1.1.2: Communication Impasses

Four of these marriages (2, 5, 8 & 18) did not work out because the couples were not able to communicate in a constructive manner. Progressively, they said that as they could no longer communicate effectively with their spouses, their relationship slowly
deteriorated and there would be anger and frustration. Helen said she could not find a way to raise any issue with her spouse without an argument. Neither could she fathom why they could no longer communicate intimately with each other. She felt mechanical and insincere and the relationship lacked spontaneity and authenticity.

Helen, Participant Number 8 (Woman, Aged 36)

“We could not talk heart-to-heart. We talk about logistics, about the kids but we couldn’t connect at a passionate level like we used to be before. I realize our communication was really bad. There was no way I could talk to him. I felt as though I was trying to change him and he did not like that and he just became very resentful.”

Betty commented that she stopped having any meaningful dialogue with her husband because they could not raise difficult issues for discussion without argument. Over time they found it painful to even talk to each other; hence, when they attempted to communicate it would be only about mundane matters, or else there would be long gaps of awkward silence.

Betty, Participant Number 2 (Woman, Aged 32)

“We were fighting so often when he was overseas. The phone calls became a duty. The communication was mundane and superficial and it came to a point when we had nothing to say to each other and there would be long silences of awkwardness.”

Eileen, whose husband had slept in a different room for a few years before their marriage ended, said they became like housemates rather than a married couple. She also confessed how her complaining and angry outbursts might have driven her husband to frustration, eventually turning him to gambling.

Eileen, Participant Number 5 (Woman, Aged 35)

“There’s a lot of complaining going on. I am guilty of it because I got no means of venting my frustrations. I would scold him so severely and throw emotional outburst and he finally blamed me for causing him to pick up the gambling habit. He said it was a form of relief.”

Rajiv also described how he started venting his anger soon after six months of marriage. He indulged for a year in verbal fights because his wife would time and again
raise issues connected to her past and he could not tolerate her daily tantrums and outbursts. Both he and his wife married very young and he felt that she needed tremendous emotional understanding, but he did not know how to support her.

Rajiv, Participant Number 18 (Man, Aged 38)

“We got along for about 6 months. But my ex-spouse, she was living in a very crisis-oriented family. I was only 21 then when she asked me, ‘I am going through lots of trouble at home, would you just marry me and bring me out?’ So I said ‘OK’ but after the first 6 months every single thing there would be an emotional outburst, there would be disorientation, she would always reflect back on the past. I could only shout at her. I don’t know how to talk to her like a wife.”

Rajiv could not get his wife to talk to him after she left the matrimonial home. He initially thought that by pretending to file a divorce she might return home, but unfortunately it did not happen.

Sub-theme 1.1.3: Absence of Communication

Two female participants, Anna and Helen and three male participants, Gopal, Mahesh and Rajiv, found that they could no longer communicate with their spouse. Anna said she and her husband stopped communicating because they were fighting all the time.

Anna, Participant Number 1 (Woman, Aged 41)

“We were having cold wars all the time. So that went on for at least eight years.”

In Helen’s case, she and her husband started to lead totally separate lives as they could no longer talk to each other. She said that she could not understand what was happening in their lives. She described their relationship towards the end of their marriage.

Helen, Participant Number 8 (Woman, Aged 36)

“I found it really hard to live with him or to talk to him. He would withdraw and he doesn’t want to talk to me so we live in our own worlds. No point trying and I feel very rejected and isolated. I don’t feel the connection in this marriage.”

The lack of communication seemed to underscore a lack of effort or inability to resolve deeper marital issues eroding the desire to remain in the marriage.
Theme 1.2: Financial Issues

Nine participants (1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 11, 12, 13 & 14), comprising seven women and two men, cited financial issues as a predisposing factor that subsequently led to the dissolution of their marriage. Money issues undermined these marriages, giving rise to matrimonial conflicts, distrust and erosion of respect. Consequently, such negative feelings led to emotional distancing. The types of financial issues faced by the participants were broken down into five sub-themes: husband’s failure to provide financially; insufficient dower; lack of money; differences in spending habits; and wife’s greater career success.

Sub-theme 1.2.1: Husband’s Failure to Provide Financially

In three cases (1, 4 & 14), the husband did not contribute to household expenses and the wife was left to shoulder the whole financial burden. Anna, Dalina and Nancy believed that this was unacceptable as they felt that their spouses were selfish, not showing any commitment and not fulfilling the spousal role; and therefore they perceived their husbands to be irresponsible.

Nancy, Participant Number 14 (Woman, Aged 48)

“He doesn’t contribute to the family. He doesn’t put in time for the family. All he cares about is himself. Whatever he earned he would spend on himself. Because I’m working so I pay up all the household expenses and I took care of most of the things.”

Sub-theme 1.2.2: Insufficient Dower

While the tradition of an Indian bride bringing a dowry with her upon her marriage is commonly known, it should be noted that it is also customary for the groom’s side to give a dower to the bride. In Mahesh’s case, his marital problems began with his inability to give his wife the jewellery she wanted for their wedding. He said she was so angry with him that she slept separately from him on their wedding night, using denial of conjugal rights to show her displeasure.
Mahesh, Participant Number 13 (Man, Aged 53)

“It started on our wedding night. We did not consummate the marriage because she was very angry with me. She wanted a lot of jewellery from my parents’ side and my family was not able to give.”

Sub-theme 1.2.3: Lack of Money

Financial strain was also a predisposing factor for Latif’s divorce. He described how the lack of money because of their heavy expenses resulted in endless quarrels and fights. These fights caused much unhappiness to the wife who subsequently withdrew from the relationship.

Latif, Participant Number 12 (Man, Aged 34)

“We were going through some financial strains and that led to many quarrels and fights over money. Over time she became rather resentful that I was not a good provider of her material need and our reliance of our visa cards became a nightmare. We were spending more than what we were earning.”

What was common in Mahesh’s and Latif’s marriages was the traditional conservative or cultural mindset on gender roles which both couples held. The parties believed strongly that “husbands should be the main financial contributors”. Therefore, the husbands were expected to be the ones with better or higher-paying careers. They were also expected to present generous gifts for the wedding ceremony. When these expectations were not met, dissatisfaction and problems developed quickly in the marriage.

Sub-theme 1.2.4: Differences in Spending Habits

For Betty, problems arose because of the different views that she and her husband had on how money should be spent and saved. Her anxiety made her complain about his spending habits. Betty explained their frequent conflicts.

Betty, Participant Number 2 (Woman, Aged 32)

“We had very different spending habits. So we did bicker about spending. We also talked about savings in a very general sense. And he’d say, ‘Ya, we’ll save one day’, and he never did it ... so I felt he didn’t mean what he said. But mostly we fought about money and spending habits.”
Sub-theme 1.2.5: Wife’s Greater Career Success

The inability of the husband to catch up with the wife in terms of career advancement was mentioned as the cause of divorce by three female participants (6, 8 & 11). In Singapore, as in other parts of Asia, there is an implicit expectation that men should be the main breadwinner and therefore they should be the more successful ones in career and income earnings. Felicia said her marriage started to deteriorate when she began to do very well in her career and her husband could not keep pace. She added that when he did not make an effort to upgrade himself, she became disappointed, angry and did not feel a sense of financial security. Felicia lamented that she lost all her respect for him because he made no effort to advance himself and his career.

Felicia, Participant Number 6 (Woman, Aged 49)

“The progress I made got bigger and greater – more and more severe gap. Later on he stagnated whereas my career flew... The worst thing is, he did not do anything, make any effort to improve himself. So when this happened, whatever respect for him is also taken away.”

In turn, Felicia’s husband took issue with her lack of respect for him. She remembered this was one of the main problems he mentioned when she asked him why he was unhappy. Like Felicia, Katherine did a lot better in her career than her husband, because she worked hard to improve herself. She said that her career blossomed after obtaining her degree. While Katherine did not mind that her husband’s career was not as successful as hers, he felt inferior because being an Asian Singaporean he felt that he had to do better than his wife. His embarrassment and bitterness caused strain in their relationship and they subsequently drifted apart.

Katherine, Participant Number 11 (Woman, Aged 51)

“One of the things that kept surfacing was the difference in our education. He didn’t even finish his ‘O’ Levels, whereas I went on to pursue a degree when I was having my third kid. However, what I did not predict was after I got my degree, my career took off. Unfortunately for him the Asian crisis came and his business went down the hill. And I was supporting the family solely. He saw it as putting him down because I was now
In two out of the three cases, the participants’ husbands went on to have extra-marital affairs. One marriage broke down because the issue affected the couple so badly that they could not talk without arguing. Helen described how her husband’s feelings of inadequacy led to communication problems between them, as cited under Sub-theme 1.1.2. This in turn resulted in the couple leading separate lives despite living together in the same house.

**Theme 1.3: Abusive Behaviours**

Verbal, physical or emotional abuse was cited by four women and three men as a reason for their divorce, although in all seven cases (4, 7, 11, 13, 17, 18 & 19) the abuse was not alluded to as the main reason for divorce. The five sub-themes are verbal and physical abuse; emotional trauma due to abuse; abuse and cultural influences; sexual abuse as an expression of dominance; and abuse and provocation.

**Sub-theme 1.3.1: Verbal and Physical Abuse**

Gopal tried to avoid his wife’s verbal abuse by leaving his marital home. He recounted his difficult contact with his wife and how she swore at him when he tried to collect his personal belongings from the marital home.

**Gopal, Participant Number 7 (Man, Aged 42)**

“After leaving home for a few days, I went home to get my uniform and I remember 20 minutes later she used the ‘F’ word on me. I just kept quiet. I don’t want to lose my temper because it will become a police case. I just walked off.”

Although Rajiv was the physical abuser, he said it was because he had been provoked by his wife’s verbal abuse to the point when he resorted to physical violence. He expressed sadness over the circumstances that often instigated him to assault her physically. He described a typical fight they used to have.
Rajiv, Participant Number 18 (Man, Aged 38)

“There were a lot of crude outbursts and when she started talking, she always revisits everything about her family members and the past over and over again. I remember, I just gave her a slap and she stopped. Almost like she snapped out of it and became another person. She would start crying and apologizing. Eventually, that kind of thing became almost like a therapy for my ex-wife.”

However, this very negative pattern of verbal and physical abuse did not provide any viable solution to their conflicts.

Sub-theme 1.3.2: Emotional Trauma Due to Abuse

This sub-theme featured only female participants (4, 11, 17 & 19). Dalina said she was willing to tolerate her husband’s affairs but when she discovered that he had another wife in Batam (an Indonesian island near Singapore), he became violent and so she decided to end her marriage. Even though Katherine was the abused party, her husband left home after a confrontation and she filed for divorce on the basis of desertion. In the cases of Queenie and Susan, they became depressed as a result of either sexual or verbal abuse. Queenie said she became very nervous, would cry easily and developed poor appetite and insomnia. Susan was so badly affected that she was hospitalised, diagnosed with clinical depression and put on medication and therapy.

Susan, Participant Number 19 (Woman, Aged 44)

“My husband would become so depressed and very agitated. He would be verbally abusive if I did not obey him. This happened six month after our marriage and I tolerated it for 10 years. But I was so badly affected by his moods and abuses that I ended up in the mental hospital with clinical depression.”

Sub-theme 1.3.3: Abuse and Cultural Influences

Mahesh and Rajiv differed from the rest in that they were the abusers in their marriage. Mahesh’s wife deserted him while Rajiv’s wife filed for divorce. An examination of the data also revealed that cultural influences sometimes influenced the husbands, and in turn, possibly led to their asserting their male dominance over their
wives. Mahesh and Rajiv, both Indians, felt that they were influenced by their cultural background which emphasized the dominant role of men in marriage.

**Mahesh, Participant Number 13 (Man, Aged 53)**

“It could be the stereotyping of the Indian man. I am the head of the family. I had the right to do what I have to do. Indian men are usually violent and can abuse the wife physically.”

**Sub-theme 1.3.4: Sexual Abuse as an Expression of Dominance**

There were two female participants (17 & 19) and one male participant (13) under this sub-theme. According to Mahesh, male dominance was not confined only to Indian man. Susan and Queenie said that their husbands, both Chinese, showed little respect for them, believing that they had the right to impose on them, and when they did not comply, the husbands became abusive.

**Susan, Participant Number 19 (Woman, Aged 44)**

“I think the primary reason was the abusive nature of my ex-husband. He felt that he had a right to treat me any way he wanted to. And he didn’t care about me, no respect for my decision and feelings.”

Queenie also shed some light on how she felt sexually abused by her Chinese husband who dominated her in bed to compensate for his feelings of inadequacy.

**Queenie, Participant Number 17 (Woman, Aged 57)**

“I thought he was becoming a pervert. He is not better than me when handling business; cannot converse as well as I do; inferior to me in many ways. Only in bed can he dominate me. He is a man; it is only in this area that he has the upper hand.”

**Sub-theme 1.3.5: Abuse and Provocation**

Two women (4 & 11) cited abuse by their husbands as the factor for their divorce. Dalina’s Malay husband was so enraged when she questioned him about the girls who called him that he hit her. He reacted this way because he did not feel she had the right to interrogate him. In Katherine’s case, when she approached the church to intervene because of her husband’s infidelity, he reacted very adversely to it and became violent.
Katherine, Participant Number 11 (Woman, Aged 51)

“I approached the church for help and he was very upset and angry with me. And we had a big argument over that. And in that argument he actually threw some chairs at me.”

Theme 1.4: Family Issues

Inability to get along with the spouse’s family was mentioned as a reason for divorce by five participants (1, 2, 5, 7 & 15), comprising three women and two men. Three of the cases were related to conflicts with in-laws, while in one case, the wife was not able to get along with her stepchildren. The four sub-themes include non-acceptance by in-laws; conflict with in-laws; problems with stepchildren; and concern over a child’s emotional reaction.

Sub-theme 1.4.1: Non-acceptance by In-laws

Betty and Gopal believed that their marriages were strained because of a lack of acceptance by both sides of their families. Betty said that the emotional disengagement between her husband and her family caused her a great deal of anxiety whenever she brought him home for dinner with her family.

Betty, Participant Number 2 (Woman, Aged 32)

“Well, it didn’t help that my parents didn’t like him and his parents didn’t really like me either. And I’m such a family person; I always feel we need to be a family. And I will be so stressed because my parents didn’t like him and he didn’t really like them when we were together.”

In Gopal’s case, his inter-racial marriage broke down because his Chinese wife could not accept his Indian family. His wife spoke badly about his family and stopped him from visiting them. She wanted him to spend more time with her side of the family instead, but despite his trying to please his wife’s family, they still would not accept him. His wife’s lack of effort in standing up for him aggravated the situation and the interference from his wife’s sisters compounded the issues.
Gopal, Participant Number 7 (Man, Aged 42)

‘I confronted her, when your brother said that I was not a member of the family and should not get involved, why didn’t you speak up on my behalf?’. She answered, ‘He’s my blood, and he’s my elder brother.’ So I said, ‘Who am I then?’ Apparently the sisters were instigating her to get a divorce.”

Sub-theme 1.4.2: Conflict with In-laws

Eileen’s divorce resulted from relational problems with her mother-in-law, arising from their inability to get along with each other. She had initially moved in to live with her mother-in-law to help as a care-giver. However, she and her mother-in-law had many interpersonal conflicts and the husband felt caught between the two women in the house who frequently nagged him about each other and criticised him for not being a good father, son and husband. This led to a loss of partnership and mutual support. His nonchalance was perceived by Eileen as a lack of commitment to resolve the issue. Subsequently, he avoided going home because he could neither cope nor deal with the constant nagging at home; and later he started his gambling again. Eileen felt abandoned by his inability to address the issues and finally initiated a divorce. He was actually relieved when she suggested this move. All two participants who had difficulties in getting along with their spouse’s family had already experienced physical separation from their partner before the divorce. Eileen and Gopal each slept in a different room from their spouses when their relationships deteriorated.

Eileen, Participant Number 5, (Woman, Aged 35)

“Sometimes I complain to him about his mother and his mother will also complain about me. The moment he stepped into the house the non-stop nagging begins.”

Apparent from the above cases, there was a strong underlying desire among the participants for emotional support from their spouses: they wanted their spouses to stand up for them and take their side in conflicts involving the participants’ in-laws. When this
did not happen, the participants felt a growing sense of resentment and emotional
estrangement from their spouses that eventually led to their marriage breakdowns.

It would appear that the lack of support by the in-laws was a key factor for these
two participants. In their view, the failure of their spouses to try to ameliorate their
problems with their in-laws led to emotional distancing and finally to the decision to stop
trying to save the marriage. Gopal’s wife did not speak to her family about including her
husband in their decision-making while Eileen’s husband failed to talk with his mother
about the cause of their marital conflicts.

**Sub-theme 1.4.3: Problems with Stepchildren**

Two participants (5 & 15) had marital issues which were related to their
stepchildren. Oscar mentioned the inability of his wife to get along with her stepchildren
as the aggravating factor for his divorce. The conflicts were between his fourth wife and
his children from his second and third marriages, leading him to conclude that marriage
was not only about managing the spousal role but also that of a parent’s.

**Oscar, Participant Number 15 (Man, Aged 65)**

“*My fourth wife, she made her choice to leave me because of the kids, especially my eldest daughter. As a father, after receiving complaint from my wife so I started scolding my children almost every day, until my daughter cannot stand it and she fought back. Finally my fourth wife left me and filed for separation because of children’s problem.*”

**Sub-theme 1.4.4: Concern over Child’s Emotional Reaction**

In Anna’s case, the negative impact of her quarrels with her husband on their elder
child was also a factor that contributed to her decision to divorce. She said her elder son
was badly affected by their quarrels and the father’s abandonment at the end of each
episode. Her crying distressed the son so badly that he harboured suicidal thoughts.
Anna, Participant Number 1 (Woman, Aged 41)

“My elder son was quite badly affected by the strained relationship we had. It came to a point when my son has suicidal thoughts. So I started getting worried that the situation between me and my husband had caused some very negative impact on him.”

Theme 1.5: Incompatibility Issues

Several types of incompatibilities were mentioned by four women and one man (2, 9, 10, 12 & 19) as contributory factors to their divorce. The divorcees referred to incompatibilities related to differences in age, physical attributes, recreational interests, expectations in marriage and the personality of the partner. Five sub-themes were identified: lack of common interests; different expectations of marriage; physical mismatch; personality mismatch/clashes; and inter-ethnic conflict.

Sub-theme 1.5.1: Lack of Common Interests

Jenny and her spouse usually could not find anything that they could do together because there was simply nothing of mutual interest, leading to increasing disinterest in each other. For example, Jenny felt she and her husband had no common interests to share or talk about.

Jenny, Participant Number 10 (Woman, Aged 40)

“Halfway through the marriage I really felt that we were not compatible. The things he liked I don’t like. The things that I liked he doesn’t like... So I love animals but he tolerated them. And he likes DIY tools and I don’t like. We are so very incompatible!”

Sub-theme 1.5.2: Different Expectations of Marriage

Betty said that her marriage did not work out because she and her husband had philosophical differences and diverse goals. She believed that in a marriage a husband should give up all his old girlfriends and they should spend leisure time together. She had entered this marriage with the belief that marriage should be happy, but realised there was something very wrong because they were often quarrelling, and she would be angry and
disappointed. It was also very embarrassing to admit to others that her marriage was not what it should be. She explained how it finally affected her decision to end the marriage.

**Betty, Participant Number 2 (Woman, Aged 32)**

“We were married only nine months so I was a little bit ashamed to file for divorce. So soon into the marriage, he had an affair; and I thought about how we were very different in the things that we want in our lives together. I expected him to give up his girl-friends but he continued to see them.”

**Sub-theme 1.5.3: Physical Mismatch**

Physical mismatch was described by Susan as the different expectations between the couple concerning taking part in physical exercise. Susan had married a much younger man who was also physically very active, and she found that although she shared many things in common with him, she simply could not keep up with the intensity of her husband’s physical activities. She shared how this difference in their energy levels caused strains in their relationship.

**Susan, Participant Number 19 (Woman, Aged 44)**

“You see, because I am older and maybe he’s correct I am a little bit lazier and slower. I am not as active as he is. ... as I reached my late 30s, he was actually in his 20s, the prime of his life and he wanted to exercise with me all the time and I was not keen.”

**Sub-theme 1.5.4: Personality Mismatch/Clashes**

A mismatch in personality was also mentioned by Latif and Iris, as predisposing their marriage to divorce. Iris remarked she did not feel that she and her husband were alike enough to spend the rest of their lives together. She said that his emotional needs had consumed her. Iris also said that her husband then felt unloved by her when she made no effort to improve the situation. They had a conversation to resolve this issue, but finally they both agreed to end the marriage as they could not bridge their personality differences.

**Iris, Participant Number 9 (Woman, Aged 30)**

“We sat down and talked about the issue and we both agreed that we could not get along, we were too different and it was too hard to work out our personality differences, so
he wanted the easy way out and I agreed as I was still young and I could get somebody better. Since he suggested annulment, I accepted the easy way out.”

Latif, on the other hand, found his wife too controlling in her behaviour. He could not get along with her as they both had dominant personalities. He described how they used to clash when making decisions.

**Latif, Participant Number 12 (Man, Aged 34)**

“She’s very domineering and she wants to lead and when I try to initiate any leading role...she doesn’t like it. So we always quarrelled over this and she always complained that I am not making any decision. So I replied: ‘Look, when I’m trying to make decision, you couldn’t accept it...so it’s never-ending.’”

**Sub-theme 1.5.5: Inter-ethnic Conflict**

In two cases, inability to reconcile differences in the couple’s ethnic background, including their differences in culture and religion, led to conflicts and eventually to their marriage breakdowns. Latif’s Chinese wife decided that she could not remain in the marriage because she no longer wanted to embrace Islam. Latif could not fathom why his wife had married him knowing that she could never accept his religion. The marriage ended because the wife renounced Islam.

Unlike Latif, Jenny, a Chinese-Singaporean and her Japanese husband fought over which country they should live in.

**Jenny, Participant Number 10 (Female, Aged 40)** expressed the following:

“He came back to Singapore reluctantly because I did not want to stay in Japan. Just less than two months, he was complaining about every single thing about Singapore. He would pick up negative things and highlight on them. And then made a big fuss out of it and criticize my country.”

**Theme 1.6: Issues on Spending Time Together**

The emotional impact of not spending quality or even enough time together was an area of serious concern for four female participants (3, 5, 8 & 14). Three sub-themes
were evident: absent spouse; lack of couple time together; and issue with physical intimacy.

Sub-theme 1.6.1: Absent Spouse

Nancy said that her marriage broke down because her husband was often not at home and this made her feel neglected and isolated. She harboured thoughts that her husband was more interested in enjoying an active social life himself than in spending time with the family. In this transcript, it was noted that there were many other contributing factors such as gambling, coming home late and leaving her alone to be a single parent.

Nancy, Participant Number 14 (Woman, Aged 48)

“Every time he comes home there were a lot of quarrels and arguments. Sometimes even fights. He had a lot of external activities and was always going out and I couldn’t take it. He gambles and come back very late at night. We have two small kids; one is 2 years old and the other one hardly 1 year old. So it’s a lot of frustration for me.”

Sub-theme 1.6.2: Lack of Couple Time Together

Helen’s relationship with her husband deteriorated for a different reason. On hindsight, she felt that as a couple they had spent too much time with their children and not enough time together on their own, leading to the death of passion. She described the impact this had on her marriage.

Helen, Participant Number 8 (Woman, Aged 36)

“I think we don’t spend enough time as a couple should. It’s always the children. We are always with the kids. Even when we sleep, the kids are with us. There’s no romance or anything like that.”

Sub-theme 1.6.3: Issue with Physical Intimacy

Another two participants, Chitra and Eileen, described the lack of physical intimacy as straining on their marriage. In fact, Chitra’s marriage was not consummated and she and her husband lived apart throughout the 10 years that they were married. Initially there was passionate love in Eileen’s marriage but over time her husband no longer shared their bedroom. She described her personal struggle with her marriage. Her sleep was often
disturbed by her mother-in-law and her stepson and this led to her husband eventually moving to another room so that he could attend to his mother and son without disturbing her. She believed that as a result of this arrangement she and her husband became like housemates who merely shared a house.

Eileen, Participant Number 5 (Woman, Aged 35)

"Because we had not been physically intimate for very, very, very long. Even though we communicate with each other but we’re like housemates."

It was quite evident from Eileen’s account that she was psychologically and emotionally unprepared to deal with her mother-in-law and her stepson at home. Her distress was further compounded by her husband, who opted to sleep separately instead of resolving their problems. It is noteworthy that the predisposing factors varied across these four cases. Chitra, an eldest daughter, had a marriage arranged by her parents; Nancy’s husband from the outset was not committed to the marriage; and Eileen and Helen were unable to spend time together with their husbands because of other unresolved issues in their marriage. Over time, the lack of intimacy and the feeling of rejection gave rise to a growing aloofness between the couples that in turn created conflict situations which finally led to a divorce. Based on the thematic analysis, it has been found that some of the couples were distanced either physically or emotionally from each other long before they filed for divorce.

Theme 1.7: Weak Foundation in Love

A weak foundation in love was raised by three female participants (6, 9 & 10) as a predisposing factor for their divorce. Basically, there was an absence of love and attraction even at the beginning stage of marriage. It appeared that the union was rather inexplicable for the couples, and that they had married for some spurious reasons. Three sub-themes were identified, namely, a lack of mutual love; married for the wrong reasons; and a lack of emotional investment in the marriage.
Sub-theme 1.7.1: Lack of Mutual Love

Felicia knew from the beginning of the marriage that she was not in love with her husband and she also realised he did not love her either.

Felicia, Participant Number 6 (Woman, Aged 49)

“Yes, I admit that actually at the day of our wedding, I already was not in love with him. Throughout the marriage I was not the most important person in his life. The feeling is reciprocal. I don’t feel any kind of love coming from him too.”

The lack of mutual love had weakened their marital bond from the start, and Felicia’s husband later gave up on the marriage and moved on to another relationship.

Sub-theme 1.7.2: Married for the Wrong Reasons

Another participant, Jenny, started to experience doubts only after her marriage. Jenny was quite cynical about why she had married her husband. She shared that she might have married him to escape the situation she was originally in, and not because she felt any love or affection for him.

Jenny, Participant Number 10 (Aged 40)

“I have the gut feeling that it won’t last... I had no idea why I married him...both of us got married for the wrong reasons. For me it would be to run away from home and mother. Naturally, marrying a foreigner, living far, far away in Japan served my purpose. I didn’t realize that was the main reason why I chose to marry him. Then for him, because I’m smart I can help him run his business.”

Sub-theme 1.7.3: Lack of Emotional Investment in the Marriage

Like Jenny, Iris struggled with doubts as to whether she actually loved her husband enough to keep her marriage going and this question persisted throughout her marriage.

She described how her confidence in her marriage vacillated.

Iris, Participant Number 9 (Woman, Aged 30)

“I had my doubts about the marriage all along. I always have a vision of spending the rest of my life with my husband. But then the person you end up marrying is different from your vision and then I realize that shouldn’t be. I think for him he felt that all the qualities I had was not enough and I think emotionally he needed more from me which I wasn’t prepared to give. I didn’t really love him enough to quench his emotional needs.”
These participants reflected on the delicate issue of the absence of passion and love and eventually, Jenny and Iris had little desire to stay in the marriage. Jenny decided to end her marriage when she and her husband could not agree on which country to live in; and even when the husband did not agree to a divorce she initiated the break-up. In Iris’s case, she went along with her husband when he asked for an annulment within a few months of marriage. She said she decided to take the easy way out to start afresh as she was confident of remarrying. Although Iris and Jenny both did not want to work at saving their marriage, they differed vastly in the duration of marriage. While the former’s marriage lasted less than a year, the latter was married for more than a decade before she called an end to it. Jenny explained why she stayed in her marriage for so long.

**Jenny, Participant Number 10 (Woman, Aged 40)**

“Probably I knew unconsciously that the marriage was not working but I refuse to acknowledge that. So throughout the 12 years I just carried on day-to-day, sort of resigned to fate. Okay this is my life, just live it.”

In contrast to Iris and Jenny, Felicia expressed a desire to save her marriage but it was her husband who wanted a divorce and she found that he had also committed adultery. She lamented that he blamed her for the failed marriage and two days after a verbal exchange, he moved out of their matrimonial home. In these marriages it is difficult to determine whether the adultery, verbal quarrels and desertion were the predisposing factors or could they also be triggers. According to Felicia, she said that only when she felt abandoned and in a state of despair did she then file for divorce.

**Theme 1.8: Spouse’s Mental Illness**

Another predisposing factor mentioned by two female participants (3 & 19) was their spouses’ mental illness. The two sub-themes identified were inability to accept spouse’s mental illness and an inability to cope with spouse’s mental illness.
Sub-theme 1.8.1: Inability to Accept Spouse’s Mental Illness

Both women reported that they were not unable to cope with their spouses’ illness, and that they developed fear and anxiety. Chitra, especially, was ill-equipped to manage her husband’s mental condition which she discovered only on the wedding night. She immediately took steps to avoid him completely by abandoning the marriage and leaving India for Singapore. Her parents found her behaviour unacceptable and felt that she had caused them a loss of face.

Chitra, Participant Number 3 (Woman, Aged 44)

“I didn’t know how to cope with his mental illness. I didn’t know how to help him. I really had phobia. I couldn’t even sit beside him or talk to him.”

Sub-theme 1.8.2: Inability to Cope with Spouse’s Mental Illness

Both Chitra and Susan did not know of their spouses’ condition before marriage. Chitra said this was because her marriage was an arranged one while Susan only found out about her husband’s pre-existing mental illness when he was hospitalised one year into their marriage.

Susan, Participant Number 19 (Woman, Aged 44) said:

“He has a bipolar condition... which I didn’t find out until about a year after my marriage. For 10 years, I hang on to the relationship even though he was continually abusive in his behaviour. He had no clue that he could not treat his wife so badly. He felt he had the right to treat me in any way he wanted. And, he didn’t care or knew how to love another being. He had no respect for my decision or feelings. On hindsight his bipolar condition might have caused him to be so unreasonable. At that time, I really couldn’t understand his behaviour and I was really in a daze.”

Although there were close parallels between these two cases, they differed in the way the participants managed their marriages. Chitra coped by running away when she discovered her husband’s mental illness on their wedding night, and had lived apart from her husband for 10 years although she was under family pressure to maintain her marital status. Susan, a Roman Catholic, stayed on with her husband, going to great lengths to take care of him and attempting to save the marriage. She explained why she did so.
Susan, Participant Number 19 (Woman, Aged 44)

“After I found out about his medical condition, I still opted to stay on with him. Primarily because I felt I owed it to him and I had a duty and I made a Catholic vow so I stayed on with him. I did everything I could ... I paid for his medical bills .... So I actually took the whole family burden for many years.”

As Susan had been dating her husband for a few years before marriage, their relationship had a stronger foundation than Chitra’s arranged marriage. Along with the way the participants managed their marriage, the reason for divorce differed between the two cases. Chitra decided to leave her marriage because she could not communicate with her husband and was emotionally distraught. She saw him as a “stranger” because they had not lived together at all during their marriage. Susan eventually left her husband over his verbal abuse that caused her emotional distress, even though she believed that his behaviour was connected to his bipolar condition.

Section 2: Precipitating Factors – Triggers to Divorce

While the eight predisposing factors were the existing issues in the marriage which contributed to weakening the participants’ marriages, the divorces were triggered by precipitating factors which are discussed in this section. Some marriages had identifiable precipitating events that finally marked the point at which the divorce seemed inevitable. In other cases, participants seemed unable to distinguish clearly between predisposing and precipitating factors, despite the researcher’s attempts to seek clarification.

The data revealed that the idea of ending a marriage by divorce did not generally emerge clearly initially for most of the participants. Rather, it developed as a series of thoughts that grew in fits and starts into a catalogue of misunderstanding, wrongs, and needs not met. This was a process of estrangement, or what Despert (1962) and Bohannon (1970) called “the emotional divorce”. They identified this as a series of stages during
which at least one of the marital partners began to develop a feeling of alienation from the other and a sense that the marriage was faltering, if not failing.

Some of the divorcees in the current study reported that during the marital turmoil they would make efforts to repair the marriage and that enabled them to continue to live together with varying degrees of tolerance, though not amicably. The predisposing factors discussed earlier would continue to be an undercurrent of dissatisfaction but not sufficient to prompt the participants to take any formal steps to terminate the relationship until some triggers came along which will be discussed in this section.

In examining the precipitating factors, four main themes were evident: desertion; spouse’s adultery; abuse (physical, verbal and sexual); and an accumulation of problems. There are also 20 sub-themes identified under this section. From Table 5.6, it can be seen that the most prevalent factor cited by the women was adultery on the part of their husbands, with desertion ranking second. However, within this sample of men, desertion ranked highest, and there was only one instance of spousal adultery, identified by Latif. Throughout the interview, he did not mention adultery but he said that his wife co-habitated with another man even before the divorce.
Table 5.6

Section 2: Precipitating Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>2.1 Desertion</th>
<th>2.2 Spouse's Adultery</th>
<th>2.3 Abuse (Physical, Verbal &amp; Sexual)</th>
<th>2.4 Accumulation of Problems</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female Participants (14)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Anna</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Betty</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Chitra</td>
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<td>4. Dalina</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>5. Eileen</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
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<td>6. Felicia</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>7. Helen</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
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<td>8. Iris</td>
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<td>9. Jenny</td>
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<td>10. Katherine</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
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<td>11. Nancy</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Penny</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Queenie</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>14. Susan</td>
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<td>Male Participants (5)</td>
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<td>7. Gopal</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Latif</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Mahesh</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Oscar</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Rajiv</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Sub-total (Men)</td>
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<td>Total for all women and men</td>
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<td>N=6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Theme 2.1: Desertion

Desertion was mentioned by three male participants (12, 13 & 15) and five female participants (1, 6, 11, 16 & 17) as a precipitating factor for their divorce. Of these eight participants, two (1 & 11) had left their spouses while the spouses of the other six (6, 12,
13, 15, 16 & 17) had walked out on them. In all the scenarios, the deserter left the matrimonial home to avoid dealing with the problems in their marriage. Most of the participants except for Anna and Katherine reported that their spouses had abandoned the home for a period of three years or more before they filed for divorce. There are eight sub-themes: desertion after triggering event; desertion following emotional distancing; pre-mediated desertion; desertion after children’s encouragement; desertion after on-going conflict with stepchildren; desertion for unexplained reason; desertion in stages; and desertion after prolonged marital conflict.

**Sub-theme 2.1.1: Desertion after Triggering Event**

When Katherine suggested approaching the church for help in resolving their marital problems, her husband turned violent and angrily left the matrimonial home. On reflection she thought this could have been the tipping point in the deterioration of their marriage, and yet in the divorce proceedings she only recalled the abandonment but not the violence and verbal abuse.

**Katherine, Participant Number 11 (Woman, Aged 51)**

“When I suggested getting the church help for our marital problems and that was the first time he went off. After a week, he came back while I was at work and he collected his clothes and he never came back again, so I filed for divorce.”

**Sub-theme 2.1.2: Desertion following Emotional Distancing**

The earlier data presented under Section 1 suggests that there was an element of emotional distancing in most, if not all, the marriages as a result of other predisposing factors. It would appear that marital problems built up and led to emotional estrangement which when left unresolved, finally weakened the marital bond to the point where a single incident could snap the will to hold on to the marriage. Felicia explained how her appeal to salvage their marriage triggered her husband to move out two days later.
Felicia, Participant Number 6 (Woman, Aged 49)

“In the last few months, there was no communication at all. I asked him what was wrong and why he felt unhappy. He complained about my unreasonable behaviour and disrespect for him. I told him that I don’t deny that but he could at least give me a chance to change. He kept quiet. I just popped the question, ‘Is it divorce that you’re looking at?’ He said, ‘Ok, fine, if that’s what you want.’ I said, ‘No, that’s not what I want. If I wanted I would just approached a lawyer and send you a letter. I don’t have to sit here now with you to drink coffee and try to salvage our relationship, for the sake of our son.’ After that incident, two days later, he moved out and so I filed for divorce.”

**Sub-theme 2.1.3: Pre-meditated Desertion**

In the other two cases, (16 & 17) the deserters left the marriage when they felt it was broken beyond repair. At the age of 63, Penny left her matrimonial home after she filed for divorce, avoiding her husband for fear that he might persuade her to stay in the marriage.

Penny, Participant Number 16 (Woman, Aged 71)

“My husband had a very serious accident in Shanghai on his way to see this woman. I felt so sad and shameful. All these years with him, I have never said anything bad about him to anyone. I feel that as long as I am married to him, he is still my husband and I should respect him. While I was in China, I discovered many things. I felt so ashamed of having such a husband. In Singapore, he has another woman and I realised she missed him so much when he was in China. So when I got back, I sneaked out after contemplating divorce for so many years. I didn’t want him to find me. Then, I filed for divorce and he didn’t see me until after our divorce.”

**Sub-theme 2.1.4: Desertion after Children’s Encouragement**

Queenie walked out on her marriage with the children’s encouragement. She believed that as her children had grown up and become more independent, and in a sense, she felt she had fulfilled her responsibility to them.

Queenie, Participant Number 17 (Woman, Aged 57)

“I told myself that my children were young. And I hope he would change. I sought help from counsellors. I suffered from two mental breakdowns. This persisted for a long while. My children are finally in the university. I told them about the sexual abuse and they understood. It was they who wanted me to leave him. My daughter told me: ‘You just leave!’ And so I left him.”
Sub-theme 2.1.5: Desertion after On-going Conflict with Stepchildren

Unlike Queenie, Oscar was not the deserter. His fourth wife left him after experiencing several years of conflicts at home with his children from his previous marriages. After 10 years of separation, she finally decided to file for divorce.

**Oscar, Participant Number 15 (Man, Aged 65)**

“This is not a case of a third party; it is because of children’s problem. So as a husband or a father in the family, I got no choice. I cannot chase away my kids and I cannot chase my wife away. So I left it for her to decide and eventually after a big fight with my eldest daughter, she made a decision to leave the family, and after 10 years of separation, she filed for divorce.”

Sub-theme 2.1.6: Desertion for Unexplained Reason

In contrast to Katherine and Felicia, Mahesh said his wife left him without informing him or explaining her reason for leaving.

**Mahesh, Participant Number 13 (Man, Aged 53)**

“I remember the date was 10th February. She just left without telling me. My mum said she (the wife) doesn’t want to come back. I don’t know what triggered her sudden decision”

Sub-theme 2.1.7: Desertion in Stages

Latif’s wife also left him following a period of conflicts. After three years of living with his mother-in-law, his wife returned to their matrimonial home but there was no intention to work on the marriage. Ten days later, she left again to live with her boyfriend. It was his wife who filed for a divorce in the Syariah Court, and Latif believed it was probably based on her reluctance to remain in the Islamic faith.

**Latif, Participant Number 12 (Man, Aged 34)**

“Initially...she moved out for three years. Later she came back for a short while because she was not comfortable staying with her parents. But at the end of the day, I know that she did not come back with the intention of trying to save the marriage and she moved out again to stay with her boyfriend.”

Latif initially hoped that the marriage could be salvaged but when his wife left to cohabit with another man, he lost that hope. Hence, it was not just an issue of desertion but
also unresolved past conflicts over their religious difference and financial problems, as well as his wife’s new relationship.

**Sub-theme 2.1.8: Desertion after Prolonged Marital Conflict**

Anna’s husband also left the matrimonial home after a period of constant conflict. They were having a cold war regularly for almost eight years preceding their divorce. Like Katherine, Anna narrated a tipping point in the breakdown of her marriage. Her husband not only left her suddenly but there were past unresolved conflicts over money, his perceived irresponsible attitude and lack of love.

**Anna, Participant Number 1 (Woman, Aged 41)**

“My husband suddenly moved out of the house and that was really the worst thing because he has not done it before. He packed his bag and he left for a month. One month later, I had a crisis, but he would not accept my call, he disappeared to Manila and I suddenly realised he did not love or care for me anymore.”

It was during her crisis with the law that Anna realised he no longer cared for her as he did not offer her any form of support when she needed it. This subsequently prompted her to file for divorce. Her lawyer expedited the proceedings and before she knew it the divorce was finalised.

**Theme 2.2: Spouse’s Adultery**

Six women (1, 2, 4, 11, 14 & 16) cited “adultery” as the trigger that led them to initiate divorce. In all these cases, the spouses had strayed as a consequence of other predisposing issues that had strained the couples’ relationships over a period of time, ranging from a few months to many years. In the three cases involving repeated infidelities, Katherine, Anna and Dalina either initially chose to forgive or ignore them. However, as the underlying issues that had led to the marital strain and consequently adultery were not resolved in all these cases, these in turn led to further occurrences of adultery. There are six sub-themes: adultery and violence; realising the loss of spouse’s
love and support; tolerance of affairs but not second marriage; discovery of spouse’s multiple families; discovery of adultery; and lack of time together leading to adultery.

Sub-theme 2.2.1: Adultery and Violence

Katherine, Participant Number 11 (Woman, Aged 51) described how the discovery of her husband’s adultery coupled with his threatened violence towards her finally triggered her decision to end her marriage.

“"The last straw came when the P.I. (private investigator) gave me the evidence that he had another woman. I approached the church for help and he (the husband) was very upset with me. And we had a big argument over that and he actually threw some chairs at me and suddenly something inside me died. Usually when he hit me I am passive because I was afraid he might get at my children. But on that particular night I remembered when he threw the chair at me I stood up and I said, ‘You want to throw chair, I can also throw chair.’ So I also took up one and threw. It was quite violent and the minute I took up the chair and shouted very loudly, he suddenly put down the second chair and stomped out of the house. My neighbours saw what happened. I locked my kids in the room and I said to myself, enough is enough. I don’t have to take anymore. I mean, I have taken many steps forward but there isn’t a step from him.”

Sub-theme 2.2.2: Realising the Loss of Spouse’s Love and Support

Anna said that there was lack of support and love from her husband and these were the predisposing factors. However, what triggered the divorce was when he deserted her at a time she needed him most in a crisis, and she finally realised he no longer loved her.

Anna, Participant Number 1 (Woman, Aged 41)

“"He was making life difficult for me. I have to struggle all the business by myself all these years. I question myself what is the point of having a husband in the house when I don’t gain anything from him. I don’t get love, money, happiness. What actually caused the divorce was he actually moved out of the house for a month. That was really the worst thing. He has never done it before and during that period I had a crisis and he won’t come back to help me and I found out he was living with his business partner in Manila. He actually said something that drained me. He said to me that he didn’t love me and had no feelings for me. He shouted: ‘I no longer love you!’ I was really totally shattered and I think these were the main triggers that finally led to the divorce.”

Sub-theme 2.2.3: Tolerance of Affairs but not Second Marriage

Dalina had for a long time acknowledged that her husband had many affairs and perhaps these might be the predisposing factors. However, when she discovered her
Muslim husband had married another woman (in Islamic marriages, a man is allowed to have up to four wives provided he can maintain all of them). Dalina found this unacceptable and it made her realise that she had to leave her marriage. She filed for divorce under the Syariah Court.

**Dalina, Participant Number 4 (Woman, Aged 45)**

“I tolerated all these because it has been different woman, at different times, over a period of time. He is not working, not maintaining me and the kids, yet he still carry on having affairs. So when he eventually got married in Batam, this is when I couldn’t take it I tell myself, ‘Oh that means he is really very serious.’ I realised I have to leave.”

**Sub-theme 2.2.4: Discovery of Spouse’s Multiple Families**

Penny ended 36 years of marriage, not because her husband had turned violent or deserted her, but because she discovered that he had children with not one but three other women. She found out about this when she visited her husband after he had an accident in Shanghai.

**Penny, Participant Number 16 (Woman, Aged 71)** described what transpired:

“I discovered many things about him. I felt so ashamed of having such a husband. But these young women, one of them, the one who bore him a son, said to me, ‘I am so sorry, you are such a nice person and yet you could still accept him. He’s such a bad person and I think women stay on because he has some money. I think the fact that the woman pitied me and said those things to me – I could not take this type of shame.”

**Sub-theme 2.2.5: Discovery of Adultery**

Of the five marriages among female participants (1, 2, 4, 11 & 14) that ended after the wives discovered their spouses’ marital adultery, Betty filed for divorce immediately while Anna, Katherine and Dalina made an effort to save their marriage. However, Latif tolerated his wife’s adultery and it never triggered him to leave the marriage until she filed for divorce. Nancy wanted to give her husband six months to change after she discovered the adultery and she allowed him to keep his routine with his children. However, when she suddenly discovered that he went with his girlfriend for a holiday and lied that it was a work trip, she filed for divorce. Betty explained why she filed for immediate divorce
because she believed that he wanted to end their marriage and therefore did very little to hide this relationship from her. She elaborated:

Betty, Participant Number 2 (Woman, Aged 32)

“He had an overseas posting and I called him one evening and a lady picked up the phone and she spoke in a casual way and I knew then that she was his lover. So when I asked for my husband, she was a bit stunned too. Then my husband took the phone and he said, ‘oh that was the cleaner’. I couldn’t speak, I was so shocked and I knew that he was lying. So that was the last straw because I already knew for a couple of months that there was already emotional distancing and the daily calls were made out of habit and obligation.”

Sub-theme 2.2.6: Lack of Time Together Leading to Adultery

Nancy felt that her husband’s adultery resulted from her lack of quality time spent with him. While she stayed home to look after the family, her husband continued to have an active social life outside. Unfortunately, his social life did not include her; and eventually he committed adultery with another woman. She subsequently filed for divorce when she caught him with his lover in a car.

Nancy, Participant Number 14 (Woman, Aged 48)

“I waited for him downstairs the woman’s house and I saw her going into his car. And I interrogated him and he finally admitted that they were close friends. He claimed that there was nothing between them but I don’t believe. Then the next day, I remember it was 2nd September 1991 and I said to him since you don’t like to be tied down, and you don’t like to look after the children and you still like to play, why don’t you just leave? So I packed his things and he left. And he willingly left the house. I then filed for divorce.”

Theme 2.3: Abuse (Physical, Verbal and Sexual)

Abuse was mentioned as the precipitating factor in four cases (participants 11, 17, 18 & 19) and a predisposing factor by two participants (4 & 13), a woman and a man. The abuse reported varied from verbal to physical and sexual. The three sub-themes are verbal abuse and unreasonable behaviour; verbal and physical abuse; and sexual abuse.
Sub-theme 2.3.1: Verbal Abuse and Unreasonable Behaviour

In Susan’s case, besides having to cope with her spouse’s mental disorder, she had to cope with his verbal abuse. She described the emotional incident that finally triggered her to divorce him.

Susan, Participant Number 19 (Woman, Aged 44)

“I think the incident that really caused me to leave – I had a knee operation a month ago and he actually wanted me to go running with him. I told him it's not possible for me to run. And, he threw a tantrum and insisted that I went with him and when I refused to, he just verbally abused me. He shouted and screamed at me and called me stupid. It finally dawned on me that he no longer cared for my well-being. And I was really frightened that he would actually now physically hurt me. And, on that day I went to my family and they supported me to file for divorce.”

Sub-theme 2.3.2: Verbal and Physical Abuse

Physical abuse was also reported by Dalina and Rajiv. Dalina said she was thrown from her bed, hit and sprayed with hot water by her husband when she confronted him about women contacting him.

Dalina, Participant Number 4 (Woman, Aged 45)

“There were always girls calling. So I asked him, ‘What’s going on actually?’ He got so agitated and shouted vulgarity at me. I was lying on the bed and he threw me out of the bed. I was so shocked, my God! It hurts me so much so I went to the toilet and just want to have a shower. I don’t want him to see me crying. That’s when he just forced open the door and he said very mean things to me and then he turned the shower to the hottest heat and you can see the steam and he sprayed the boiling hot water on me. My goodness that incident I couldn’t take it and when I returned to Singapore I filed for a divorce!”

In another two marriages, the abuse was both verbal and physical. Mahesh said he threw things at his wife and hurt her emotionally with his words. In Katherine’s case, her husband was highly critical of her and their children. She detailed the way he verbally abused them and how it affected them. Katherine’s husband would also pelt her with objects. She spoke of the violent incident that triggered her divorce.
Katherine, Participant Number 11 (Woman, Aged 51)

“And in that heated argument he actually threw some chairs at me and that was when I sort of something inside me... and I knew that was the last straw when the whole thing overflow and I stood up and fought back”.

Sub-theme 2.3.3: Sexual Abuse

Other than physical and verbal abuse, sexual abuse was mentioned by one participant as the reason for her divorce. Queenie described how her husband would have sex with her even when she was sick.

Queenie, Participant Number 17 (Woman, Aged 57)

“We have to work at 5 am and before I wake up, he would want me to satisfy him. At times, I really feel very tired and sick. On days that I fell ill, he would not work. While I was sleeping he would have sex with me. I hated it.... I told him not to have sex with me when I am sick and if he did it again, I would not want to be with him anymore. Each time, he would apologise and then he would do it again. One day I was so sick and I had an injection and the doctor said I was depressed. While I was sleeping he forced me to have sex again and I was hurting inside and after that day, I sneaked out and he could not find me for three years and on the next year I filed for divorce.”

Theme 2.4: Accumulation of Problems

The accumulation of problems was mentioned by three participants (8, 10 & 12) two women and one man as both a predisposing and precipitating factors for their divorce. These participants gave up on their marriages due to the confluence of issues. There are three sub-themes: unresolved issues and one trigger; unresolved disagreement over choice of country of residence; and unresolved dispute over religious differences.

Sub-theme 2.4.1: Unresolved Issues and One Trigger

Helen was frustrated by a string of issues with her husband, from struggling to deal with a joyless marriage to not getting any love, concern or money from him. She explained how the combination of unresolved issues and one triggering event resulted in her filing for a divorce.
Helen, Participant Number 8 (Woman, Aged 36)

“I think problems accumulated for more than 2 years and I think it became worse because he was under a lot of stress with career and boss. So it didn’t help when I tried to give my opinion because he felt that I was invading into his space and it ended up with him being in a bad mood and I would be resentful and felt misunderstood and it was endless quarrel. I think what triggered was at work I was sort of sexually harassed verbally by my boss. I told him about it and all he said was it was my problem, just deal with it. And I felt that he was quite indifferent. There’s no concern so I decided to end the marriage.”

Sub-theme 2.4.2: Unresolved Disagreement over Choice of Country of Residence

It is understandable that decisions over the choice of a country of residence would arise in cosmopolitan Singapore where marriages between different nationalities have been on the rise. According to the Singapore National Population Secretariat (2009), half of the marriages in Singapore involve at least one non-Singapore citizen, 40% more than five years ago. Therefore, disagreement over which country to live in could become a real issue; and as mentioned by Jenny it was the precipitating factor for her divorce. The Singaporean participant and her Japanese husband had lived in both Singapore and Japan, but neither party was happy living in the other’s country. Living in Singapore was very difficult for her husband and he expressed his resentment and anger continually to her.

Jenny, Participant Number 10 (Woman, Aged 40)

“Everything he disliked about Singapore... the hawker centre... the hygiene conditions... the newspaper, the government party, the tax department, the CPF Board; the highway; and this taxi cut in front of him and he went ballistic. He would scold and abuse me, he was verbally abusing my friends, my family, my countrymen and he would like criticize every single thing in Singapore ... Suddenly on that particular day when this was happening I suddenly said, that’s it! I can’t live with this man for the rest of my life and then I filed for divorce.”

Sub-theme 2.4.3: Unresolved Dispute over Religious Differences

In Latif’s case, the precipitating reason for divorce was religious differences. His Chinese wife had converted from Christianity to Islam when they got married. He described how their religious differences affected their marriage.
Latif, Participant Number 12 (Man, Aged 34)

“At the end of the day, I think it just didn’t work out and the precipitating factor is because of our religious difference... And from what I know, she tried to read up the Islam religion but as time goes by, she realised she could not maintain that and slowly, slowly she lost her faith and eventually she did not see a future in that. ... If we were to have children, we may have conflicts again in deciding what religion the children should adopt.”

Latif added that his wife filed for divorce because she realised she could not convince herself to accept his religion in spite of the fact that she knew he loved her very much and could make her happy. He felt that she could not envisage how this difference could be resolved in their marriage.

Summary of the Predisposing and Precipitating Reasons for Divorce

The thematic analysis of the participants’ interviews identified various factors that contributed to divorce. These were grouped as predisposing or precipitating factors. Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed some clear patterns. These marriages were already subjected to stress by the predisposing factors for extended periods before the precipitating factors triggered the divorce decision. While predisposing factors might not in themselves end a marriage, it is clear from the narratives of all the 19 participants that an inability by one or both parties to manage the problems effectively or appropriately had aggravated the situation, eventually leading to other marital issues which in turn finally fractured the marriage. Many participants were able to identify clearly the precipitating factors which became the tipping point in their marriage, triggering a decision to end it. Others were not so clear in drawing a line between predisposing and precipitating factors. This is consistent with the research of Bodenmann & Cina (2006) which confirmed that while participants reported trivial daily stressful events as an important reason for their decision to divorce, these could be perceived more as a triggering condition.

The term “causes of divorce” had a number of meanings for different divorcees. Susan, Eileen and a few other divorcees interpreted the term using Singapore legal grounds
for divorce, for example, “unreasonable behaviour”, while Anna used the term “desertion”.

Dalina, Chitra, Katherine and Rajiv interpreted it as social and psychological factors, while Eileen and Jenny presented the reasons for divorce as if they were a series of marital complaints. The 12 major predisposing and precipitating themes identified in the qualitative analysis and the 50 sub-themes are summarised in Tables 5.7 and 5.8.

**Table 5.7**

**Section 1: Predisposing Factors – Leading to Divorce**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total &amp; Gender</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.1: Communication Issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=9</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.1.1: Non-truthful Communication</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men=3</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.1.2: Communication Impasses</td>
<td>2, 5, 8 &amp; 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women=6</td>
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<td>1.1.3: Absence of Communication</td>
<td>1, 7, 8, 13 &amp; 18</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2: Financial Issues</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=9</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.2.1: Husband’s Failure to Provide Financially</td>
<td>1, 4 &amp; 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men=2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.2.2: Insufficient Dower</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women=7</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.2.3: Lack of Money</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.2.4: Differences in Spending Habits</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.2.5: Wife’s Greater Career Success</td>
<td>6, 8 &amp; 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.3: Abusive Behaviours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=7</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.3.1: Verbal and Non-verbal Abuse</td>
<td>7 &amp; 18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Men=3</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.3.2: Emotional Trauma due to Abuse</td>
<td>4, 11, 17 &amp; 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women=4</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.3.3: Abuse and Cultural Influences</td>
<td>13 &amp; 18</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.3.4: Sexual Abuse as an Expression of Dominance</td>
<td>13, 17 &amp; 19</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.3.5: Abuse &amp; Provocation</td>
<td>4 &amp; 11</td>
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</table>
**Table 5.7 continued**

**Section 1: Predisposing Factors – Leading to Divorce**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>N=5</th>
<th>1.4: Family Issues</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men=2</td>
<td>1.4.1: Non-acceptance by In-laws 2 &amp; 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women=3</td>
<td>1.4.2: Conflict with In-laws 5 &amp; 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.4.3: Problems with Stepchildren 5 &amp; 15</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.4.4: Concern over Child’s Emotional Reaction</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N=5</th>
<th>1.5: Incompatibility Issues</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Man=1</td>
<td>1.5.1: Lack of Common Interests 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women=4</td>
<td>1.5.2: Different Expectations of Marriage 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.5.3: Physical Mismatch 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.5.4: Personality Mismatch/Clashes 9 &amp; 12</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.5.5: Inter-ethnic Conflict 10 &amp; 12</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N=4</th>
<th>1.6: Issues on Spending Time Together</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women=4</td>
<td>1.6.1: Absent Spouse 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.6.2: Lack of Couple Time Together 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.6.3: Issue with Physical Intimacy 3, 5 &amp; 8</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N=3</th>
<th>1.7: Weak Foundation in Love</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women=3</td>
<td>1.7.1: Lack of Mutual Love 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.7.2: Married for the Wrong Reasons 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.7.3: Lack of Emotional Investment in the Marriage 6, 9 &amp; 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N=3</th>
<th>1.8: Spouse’s Mental Illness</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women=2</td>
<td>1.8.1: Inability to Accept Spouse’s Mental Illness 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.8.2: Inability to Cope with Spouse’s Mental Illness 3 &amp; 19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.8

**Section 2: Precipitating Factors – Triggers to Divorce**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total &amp; Gender</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>N=8</strong></td>
<td>2.1: Desertion</td>
<td>2.1.1: Desertion after Triggering Event</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men=3</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.1.2: Desertion following Emotional Distancing</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women=5</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.1.3: Pre-meditated Desertion</td>
<td>16 &amp; 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.1.4: Desertion after Children’s Encouragement</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.1.5: Desertion after On-going Conflict with Stepchildren</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.1.6: Desertion for Unexplained Reason</td>
<td>6, 11 &amp; 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.1.7: Desertion in Stages</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.1.8: Desertion after Prolonged Marital Conflict</td>
<td>1 &amp; 11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **N=6** | 2.2: Spouse’s Adultery | 2.2.1: Adultery and Violence | 11 |
| Man=0 | | 2.2.2: Realising the Loss of Spouse’s Love and Support | 1 |
| Women=6 | | 2.2.3: Tolerance of Affairs But Not Second Marriage | 4 |
| | | 2.2.4: Discovery of Spouse’s Multiple Families | 16 |
| | | 2.2.5: Discovery of Adultery | 1, 2, 4, 11, 12 & 14 |
| | | 2.2.6: Lack of Time Together Leading to Adultery | 14 |

| **N=6** | 2.3: Abuse (Physical, Verbal and Sexual) | 2.3.1: Verbal Abuse and Unreasonable Behaviour | 19 |
| Men=2 | | 2.3.2: Verbal and Physical Abuse | 4, 11, 13 & 18 |
| Women=4 | | 2.3.3: Sexual Abuse | 17 |

| **N=3** | 2.4: Accumulation of Problems | 2.4.1: Unresolved Issues and One Trigger | 8 |
| Men=1 | | 2.4.2: Unresolved Disagreement over Choice of Country of Residence | 10 |
| Women=2 | | 2.4.3: Unresolved Dispute over Religious Differences | 12 |
Affective Reasons

Table 5.7 shows that the predisposing factors cited by the 19 participants for their marriage ending centred on the affective qualities of the relationship including: (a) communication problems (nine participants); (b) incompatibility (five participants); (c) spending time together (four participants); and, (d) weak foundation in love (three participants). Communication problems were the most commonly reason for divorce cited by three men and six women. Under the main theme of incompatibility issues were included statements originally coded as lack of common interest and expressed loss of love, trust and changed values and lifestyle demands or desires. For example some statements cited by divorcees were: “We both agreed that we could not get along,” and “the things he liked I don’t like.”

In this study, spouse’s adultery as a precipitating factor (see Table 5.8) has been associated with violence, desertion and marital discord. The narratives also showed that adultery has the connotation of deterioration in the affective and emotional realm of the marriage associated with loss of love, betrayal of trust, and growing apart as highlighted by (Glass & Wright, 1997). Spousal adultery was perceived as the main provocation for divorce by six women and one man. However, the impact of adultery as a reason for divorce may depend on the meaning and importance that individuals attach to its occurrence. Dalina, Katherine and Penny each tolerated their husbands’ affairs in the relationship for a variety of reasons, while for Betty adultery was a fundamental and unforgivable breach in the marital contract, a perception that was also cited by (Vaughn, 1986; Hartin, 1988).

Despite efforts made by some of the participants to work out issues following the discovery of their spouse’s adultery, their marriages still ended in divorce. Felicia’s husband, for instance, left their marital home two days after she attempted to talk to him
about their problems and Katherine’s husband threw chairs at her before stomping off following her attempts to communicate with him. In the findings of this research, it is clear from many participants’ narratives that the quality of the marriage had been deteriorating for some period of time before the divorce decision. Emotional distancing, quarrels, discord, unresolved issues and resentment were all cumulative predisposing factors that weakened and fractured a marriage. Despite these, many participants might have clung on to their marriages indefinitely, hoping it might still be saved. But, for those participants who initiated divorce, a point was then reached when they decided it was no longer worth staying in the marriage. This could be due to a single triggering incident or a point when the accumulation of factors simply became too heavy a weight to bear. It is conceivable that in the case of the participants who were not the initiators of the divorce, their spouses would have gone through a similar process that finally pushed them over the brink to file for divorce.

Participants who cited adultery as the reason for divorce did so either suddenly or after a prolonged period of tolerance that could span years. The interviews with women indicated that in these scenarios the woman had already put up with a lot during the marriage – such as emotional distancing, lack of physical intimacy, cold wars, in-law problems, abuse, adultery and violence – but at some point came the final straw: the husband did something or said something to her, and that was when she finally realised that her husband really did not care for her anymore. In the depths of the great emotional wounding that this realisation (e.g., Anna, Susan, Felicia, Dalina & Penny) became the tipping point to end the marriage. In the end, it was the realisation of the loss of love that timely brought home the futility of saving the marriage, and that then precipitated the divorce decision.
Physical, Verbal and Sexual Abuse

Of the participants who reported that physical/verbal/sexual abuse was the main reason for marriage breakdown, seven (three men and four women) saw it as a predisposing factor while another six participants (four women and two men) reported it as a precipitating factor. Only Dalina and Katherine cited it as both a predisposing and precipitating factor. Participants were not asked if abuse was the main reason for marriage breakdown. However, Raja and Mahesh were able to share their insight that their own aggressive behavior toward their wives was a main cause of divorce.

Abusive behavior was cited as a main reason for divorce but again depending on how participants interpreted the meaning of this reason, aspects of this form of abuse could have been subsumed under responses related to a spouse’s personality traits or communication problems. The presence of physical violence or emotional abuse was not always alluded to as the main reason for divorce. A key emergent theme in this study is the dominant role husbands play in a marriage. Mahesh and Raja, who are both Indians, subscribed to a belief of male supremacy within marriage. As suggested by Mahesh, this could have been passed down from a traditional Indian background that reinforces the position of men as the heads of the households with the right to do as they please in a marriage. This might in turn have influenced them to physically abuse their wives when they were unable to resolve family issues. The flip side of the coin to the belief is the rights of a husband over his wife’s body and mind, and the male belief that the wife should always give in or submit to her husband totally and unquestioningly. This could have been the underlying cause of verbal abuse in Susan’s case, notwithstanding her husband’s bipolar condition. In Queenie’s case it was sexual abuse and for Penny her husband’s multiple affairs.
Financial Issues

A total of nine participants said that financial issues were the main cause of their marriage ending. Financial issues, according to the findings of this research, can lead to greater isolation, emotional stress and depression. For the men, unresolved financial issues can lead to lower self-esteem, as reported by Felicia and Katherine, whose husbands were unable to come to terms with their wives’ greater career mobility; Felicia’s husband withdrew from the family and Katherine’s husband became verbally and physically abusive. Such reactions from the husbands could in turn generate or exacerbate marital tensions. The fixation on the dominant role of men in the marriage reflected a tacit acceptance of gender roles and expectations by some of the husbands and wives in this study. For example, there was expectation among some female participants that their husbands should be the main financial contributors, and that husbands should be more successful than them in their careers. These expectations also seemed to be shared by their husbands. When the expectations were not fulfilled, the women participants, such as Anna, Dalina, Felicia, Helen, Katherine and Nancy, expressed unhappiness in their marriage. In turn, their husbands reacted by deserting them physically or emotionally, turning to other women in extramarital affairs, and/or through verbal, physical or sexual abuse to exert their dominance in the relationship. For example, Queenie believed that her husband exerted sexual dominance against her will in order to compensate for his feelings of inferiority away from the marriage bed.

Incompatibility Issues

It would appear that inter-racial marriages, by their nature, impose additional demands on marriage adjustment on the part of one or both spouses. In the three inter-racial marriages studied, the inability to accommodate differences in values, culture or
religion had led to much friction and weakened the marriage. Two of these marriages ended prematurely because of irreconcilable differences. Jenny and her Japanese husband did not like living in each other’s country and, literally, could not find common ground to anchor their marriage and build a strong marital home, while Latif’s Chinese wife decided she could no longer embrace Islam as her religion. Gopal felt his Chinese in-laws were instrumental in the failure of his marriage. He perceived that their rejection of him stemmed from their refusal to accept his Indian racial background. It must be emphasized, however, that according to the study, race alone was not the sole contributory cause of non-approval from one partner’s family. Indeed, Latif had a good relationship with his Chinese in-laws while Betty’s marriage ended up in divorce following family disapproval as explained by her: “It didn’t help that my parents didn’t really like him and his parents didn’t really like me either.”

**Part C: The Initial Outcomes of Divorce**

The discussion in Part C centers on the second and third research questions enumerated in Chapter 3: (a) “How do divorcees in Singapore adjust after a divorce?” and (b) “What are the positive and negative post-divorce outcomes?”

The analysis therefore deals with participants’ responses to two of the interview questions: (a) positive and negative outcomes experienced immediately after filing for divorce and (b) positive and negative outcomes after the divorce was finalized. Although the researcher had originally intended to collect data on the participants’ recollections of both these periods, she found during the interviews that, given the intervening lapse of time since their divorce, several participants had merged their memories of these two periods, especially in the cases where the divorces were granted quite soon after the petitions were filed. As these participants were unable to deal with the events separately in their recall,
the researcher decided to analyze as a whole the initial post-divorce experiences without differentiating the time element in the thematic analysis. While the majority of the participants felt that the post-divorce experience was initially a negative one, for many, the unpleasantness had faded with time allowing the emergence of positive outcomes and benefits. The research showed that some of the participants were able to return to full functioning after the divorce. However, only two of them felt they were negatively impacted as they felt their divorce experience to be traumatic.

In Part C the categories of themes identified are the following: (a) positive initial outcomes of divorce and (b) negative initial outcomes of divorce, denoted as Section 3a and 3b respectively.

**Section 3a: Positive Initial Outcomes of Divorce (+)**

The four main themes identified under Section 3a are marshalling positive emotions; maintaining financial stability through employment; improved communication with ex-spouse as well as greater focus on work and career.

The participants whose responses came under this section are shown in Table 5.9. From the distribution of participants’ responses categorized under the various themes, the researcher noted that more women reported positive initial outcomes compared to the men. Among the 14 women there were 23 responses that came under these themes, an average of 1.6 positive outcomes reported by each woman. The five men, on the other hand, reported only four positive outcomes in total an average of 1.0 per theme.

The researcher is unsure whether the reason for the women reporting more positive outcomes is due to their greater sensitivity to their inner changes or because the men may be experiencing more difficulty in managing the process of introspection. In the absence of further data it is difficult to draw any inferences or conclusions. However, the
researcher considered this difference to be a point worth noting. Within the whole group, the only participants who did not express any positive initial outcomes at all were Dalina, Gopal and Oscar (4, 7 & 15). This is related to their self-assessment of the overall degree of post-divorce adjustment which will be discussed in detail later.

Table 5.9

Section 3a: Main Themes: Positive Initial Outcomes of Divorce (+)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>3a.1: Marshalling Positive Emotions</th>
<th>3a.2: Maintaining Financial Stability through Employment</th>
<th>3a.3: Improved Communication with Ex-spouse</th>
<th>3a.4: Greater Focus on Work and Career</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female Participants (14)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Anna</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Betty</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Chitra</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Dalina</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Eileen</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Felicia</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Helen</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Iris</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Jenny</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Katherine</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Nancy</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Penny</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Queenie</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Susan</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total (Women)</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=10</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=6</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=5</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=2</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.9 continued

Section 3a: Main Themes: Positive Initial Outcomes of Divorce (+)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male Participants (5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. Gopal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Latif</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Mahesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Oscar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Rajiv</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sub-total (Men)  N=1  N=1  N=1  N=1

Total for all women and men  N=11  N=7  N=6  N=3

The only theme where sub-themes were identified was Marshalling Positive Emotions. This is presented in summary with the breakdown of the participants concerned in Table 5.10.

Table 5.10

Section 3a: Sub-themes: Positive Initial Outcomes of Divorce (+)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3a.1: Marshalling Positive Emotions</td>
<td>3a.1.1: Increase in Self-esteem</td>
<td>1 &amp; 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3a.1.2: Feeling a Sense of Relief</td>
<td>1, 5 &amp; 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3a.1.3: Feeling a Sense of Peace</td>
<td>16 &amp; 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3a.1.4: Regaining a Sense of Freedom</td>
<td>3, 10, 11, 12, 16 &amp; 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3a.1.5: Drawing Strength</td>
<td>1, 11 &amp; 17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Theme 3a.1: Marshalling Positive Emotions (+)**

Throughout the interviews, the divorcees used many emotional words like “fear”, “anger”, “hurt”, and “sad” to describe their emotions before the divorce. One of the major changes that the ten female participants (1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 16, 17 & 19) reported was that they were able to draw on positive emotions and cope with many of the disruptive emotions experienced following divorce. Before the divorce, they felt much sadness and ill feeling because of the arguments and quarrels as well as emotional ambiguities, but the divorcees immediately enjoyed a greater sense of emotional well-being after they ended their marriage. Jenny was very happy with her divorce and said that she did not need any post-divorce help. Anna became a happier person and considered herself to be more positive as she rebuilt her life. The following example illustrates the positive emotions that could be construed as positive outcomes.

**Anna, Participant Number 1 (Woman, Aged 41)**

“I think I become a happier person. I realize that if I continue with the marriage I would probably become very depressed and negative. A lot of people said that I look totally different. They couldn’t even recognize me now. I think I am confident and happier from the inner me. I look forward to every day immediately after I got my divorce.”

**Sub-theme 3a.1.1: Increase in Self-esteem (+)**

Divorce motivated two female participants (1 & 3) to develop self-love and a change in the perception of self. Anna said that she began to pay more attention to her physical well-being which she had neglected during her marriage. She described how she would allow herself to “put on make-up”, “dress up beautifully”, “go to hair-salons” and enjoy “manicures and pedicures.” Chitra was initially worried about being stigmatised by her conservative community for divorcing her husband. But over time she said she learnt how to present herself better to overcome this by remaking her image and status in a way to gain respect from the community. She was determined to succeed.
Chitra, Participant Number 3 (Woman, Aged 44)

“I want to do something about my image. I was very conscious about my status in the society. I need to prove to them I’m not going to be black marked by them and I improve myself and make conscious effort to look good so that they will respect me again.”

Sub-theme 3a.1.2: Feeling a Sense of Relief (+)

Part of the positive experience after divorce was attributed to relief from the problems in the marriage. Three female participants (1, 5 & 6) expressed relief at the end of their marital relationship. They mentioned that personal and family life benefitted positively from the cessation of conflict and marital discord. Eileen and Anna, who were the main breadwinners in their marriages, believed that after the divorce, they no longer had to worry about any financial or other problems created by their ex-husbands.

Divorce also provided some relief from the irksome and unpleasant responsibilities the participants had during their marriage. Eileen, who had divorced her husband over conflicts with her mother-in-law, said she was relieved she no longer had to take care of her sickly mother-in-law and her stepson. She felt relieved of the constant nagging, shouting and sarcasm from her mother-in-law. All three women experienced a sense of relief that helped in their journey of recovery.

Eileen, Participant Number 5 (Woman, Aged 35)

“During the marriage, I am more so of a maid to him, baby-sit his son, help to nurse his mum when she is sick. Today I don’t have to feel responsible for the son and I don’t have to wake up early. I have time on my own and this is a big difference.”

In addition, two participants said they were relieved at being released from their conjugal duties. Eileen said her relationship with her ex-husband had broken down to the point where she dreaded having sex with him. Felicia, whose marriage had a weak foundation in love, said that having sex with her husband became a burden towards the end of her marriage. She was relieved at not having to sleep with the man she no longer loved.
Felicia, Participant Number 6 (Woman, Aged 49)

“At last I clear the emotional burden after 17 years of having to fulfil my duty and obligation as a wife to a man that I don’t love anymore.”

Oscar, who had suffered negative publicity about his marriage as he was well-known in his field, was much relieved that the divorce stopped further negative publicity. Jenny said she was relieved she no longer had to listen to her Japanese ex-husband’s complaints about living in Singapore. In Anna’s case, her affective moods were strongly influenced by those of her husband’s during their marriage, and she was glad she did not have to manage her husband’s “black moods” after her divorce.

Sub-theme 3a.1.3: Feeling a Sense of Peace (+)

When their divorce was finalised, two female participants (16 & 19) enjoyed a sense of peace. Penny’s main feeling was simply a sense of tranquillity, rather than happiness or elation.

Penny, Participant Number 16 (Woman, Aged 71)

“I am at peace. The lawyer congratulated me. I don’t feel particularly happy or elated. Just felt very peaceful.”

Such feelings of being at peace are often related to relief from problems in the marriage. Susan, who had taken on the responsibility for caring for her bipolar husband was able to enjoy a sense of peace because she was no longer a victim to his outbursts and unpredictable demands.

Susan, Participant Number 19 (Woman, Aged 44)

“After the divorce was finalised, I enjoy peace and being alone. Because being in the same house with him was scary and I didn’t know when he would hit me.”

Sub-theme 3a.1.4: Regaining a Sense of Freedom (+)

Six participants – five women and one man – (3, 10, 11, 12, 16 & 19) were happy to regain their freedom after their divorce. Finally freed from the fetters of marital ties, attachment and responsibilities, they rejoiced in the liberty to do what they wanted and to
go anywhere they fancied. Indeed, what the five women shared in the interviews was an increased sense of freedom, competence, and self-worth following marital dissolution. Katherine believed that she could now establish a rich life in terms of her career and children as well as friends.

**Katherine, Participant Number 11 (Woman, Aged 51)**

“I felt finally I’m like a bird that was let out of a cage. And there were a lot of things I had already planned in mind. And I told myself it is my opportunity to get out there on my own. Start a life afresh with my children and we’ll adjust along the way. And that was something that we felt was really good.”

**Sub-theme 3a.1.5: Drawing Strength (+)**

There were three female participants (1, 11 & 17) who drew strength from their children. Queenie, who said that she was emotionally and sexually abused by her husband because he demanded excessive sexual intercourse with her, commented she was proud to have finally found the strength to bring an end to her long emotional sufferings. She mentioned the role of her children in keeping her strong and focused before and after the divorce. An important outcome that she felt was the sense of support, empowerment and endorsement that came from her children’s urgings to leave an unhappy marriage.

**Queenie, Participant Number 17 (Woman, Aged 57)**

“I must have summoned enough courage for me to arrive at a decision to divorce him. I didn’t dare to do it; it was my children who have been encouraging me to leave him. I have been avoiding this issue for so long. Finally, I gather the strength to resolve this longstanding painful problem.”

**Theme 3a.2: Maintaining Financial Stability through Employment (+)**

Another factor contributing to positive adjustment was financial stability. Seven participants, six women and one man (1, 2, 5, 6, 11, 12 & 19) who were gainfully employed at the time of divorce mentioned that their incomes were not affected post-divorce as their spouses had not been actively supporting the family. Felicia felt relieved at being freed of her husband’s financial problems.
Felicia, Participant Number 6, (Female, Aged 49) said:

“He got himself into a lot of financial problem. His business failed. He was running into a lot of debts. Debts collectors and banks were coming after him. I was embroiled in his financial problems, but after the divorce I was freed of the financial burden immediately. As I was employed, I didn’t have financial obligations anymore.”

Theme 3a.3: Improved Communication with Ex-spouse (+)

While the pre-divorce life of six participants, five women and one man (1, 5, 6, 8, 14 & 18), had been characterised by communication difficulties with their spouses, their post-divorce life saw a remarkable change. All the six participants reported that they enjoyed improved communication with their ex-spouse without acrimony or rancour after their divorce. Helen was able to enjoy better communication with her ex-husband after their divorce. She said they could now talk without getting into an argument and their common goal was to communicate well for the three children’s sake. More importantly, she said, in the reorganisation of the family, she was able to focus on co-parenting with her husband.

Helen, Participant Number 8 (Woman, Aged 36)

“The other thing is that after the divorce I communicate with my husband better. We could talk and not quarrel when there were problems and I would listen to him and take his advice and vice versa. This was very apparent especially on issues connected to the welfare of our kids.”

Theme 3a.4: Greater Focus on Work and Career (+)

Three participants, Anna, Felicia and Mahesh (1, 6 & 13), said that after their divorce they gave more attention to their work and career, which in turn brought them support from their bosses and colleagues. The support helped a great deal in managing the difficult journey after divorce.

Mahesh, Participant Number 13, (Man, Aged 53) said:

“My way of adjusting was actually throwing myself into work. And I had a great time at work. I had great colleagues; I had a boss who was very good to me, who taught me a lot of things.
Section 3b: Negative Initial Outcomes of Divorce

While some participants experienced positive outcomes, others reported a range of negative outcomes from their divorce. These impacted their well-being on all levels in the context of their personal, social and family lives. Thirteen participants, comprising 11 women and two men (1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18 & 19), experienced immediate distress after the divorce, recalling the period as a turbulent and wrenching one. Their negative emotions ranged from mixed feelings, loneliness, guilt, worry and stress, sadness, uncertainty and confusion to anger and a sense of loss and regret. Six main themes have been identified: experiencing negative emotions; physical and psychological distress; family life; financial issues; fear of involvement in romantic relationships; and having to cope on their own (see Table 5.11).

Once again, the researcher noted that the women reported more negative outcomes compared to the men, with all the women expressing at least one negative initial outcome. Altogether, the 14 women were represented a total of 29 times under these themes, an average of 2.1 times each. The five men, however, were represented only eight times under these six themes, an average of 1.6 times. Rajiv was hit hard by his divorce, registering under four of the themes on negative outcomes. As with the positive outcomes, Oscar was again the only person in the whole group who did not report any negative outcomes. The researcher noted that his divorce at the age of 62 was preceded by 10 years of physical separation after his fourth wife left him, and perhaps by the time of the interview three years later he could not recall his immediate post-divorce circumstances and emotions, whether positive or negative. Oscar was one of the two participants who were not very forthcoming about their feelings post-divorce.

The higher incidence of negative outcomes among the women parallels their experience of positive outcomes, as noted in this section of the thesis. In the absence of
further study on the reasons for the higher reporting of outcomes – both positive and negative – by women compared to the men, the researcher can only postulate that this could possibly be due to the women being more in tune with their inner world and more readily expressive than men.

Table 5.11

*Section 3b: Main Themes: Negative Initial Outcomes of Divorce (−)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Main Themes: N = 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3b.1: Experiencing Negative Emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Participants (14)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Anna</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Betty</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Chitra</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Dalina</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Eileen</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Felicia</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Helen</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Iris</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Jenny</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Katherine</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Penny</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Queenie</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Susan</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-total (Women)</td>
<td>N=12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Participants (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Gopal</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Latif</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Mahesh</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Oscar</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Rajiv</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-total (Men)</td>
<td>N=2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total for all women and men</td>
<td>N=14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are 11 sub-themes and these are mixed feelings; loneliness; guilt; worry and stress; sadness; uncertainty and confusion; anger; sense of loss and regret; fear of children suffering social disapproval; father’s attitude towards the divorce; and conflicts with ex-spouse (see Table 5.12).

Table 5.12

Section 3b: Sub-themes: Negative Initial Outcomes of Divorce (-)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3b.1: Experiencing Negative Emotions</td>
<td>3b.1.1: Mixed Feelings</td>
<td>9, 16 &amp; 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3b.1.2: Loneliness</td>
<td>1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 &amp; 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3b.1.3: Guilt</td>
<td>1, 4, 6 &amp; 8 &amp; 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3b.1.4: Worry and Stress</td>
<td>11 &amp; 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3b.1.5: Sadness</td>
<td>4, 8, 14 &amp; 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3b.1.6: Uncertainty and Confusion</td>
<td>8, 9 &amp; 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3b.1.7: Anger</td>
<td>6 &amp; 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3b.1.8: Sense of Loss and Regret</td>
<td>4, 16 &amp; 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b.3: Family Life</td>
<td>3b.3.1: Fear of Children Suffering Social Disapproval</td>
<td>8, 11 &amp; 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3b.3.2: Father’s Attitude towards the Divorce</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3b.3.3: Conflicts with Ex-spouse</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme 3b.1: Experiencing Negative Emotions (-)

Sub-theme 3b.1.1: Mixed Feelings (-)

Instead of a single emotion, three women (9, 16 & 19) said they experienced mixed feelings in the immediate post-divorce period. Susan experienced “anger, frustration, uncertainties, sadness and anxiety” in the first month of her divorce, and all she could do was to cry all the time. Penny admitted she did not feel good about her divorce even though she wanted it. On the other hand, while Iris was sad that one part of her life had ended, she was also happy that her marital problems had been resolved.
Iris, Participant Number 9 (Woman, Aged 30)

“I felt a bit sad. Everything has come to an end that things don’t work out. But I also felt it’s a very mixed feeling. I also felt happy and relieved that I got what I wanted and after all it wasn’t so hard to get a divorce. I feel like one thing in my life has been sorted out but I am missing out too.”

Sub-theme 3b.1.2: Loneliness (-)

Loneliness was identified by eight participants, seven women and one man, (1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 & 19) as having negatively impacted their adjustment. Indeed, three participants expressly said that they were afraid of being lonely. For many, a paralysing fear was the first thing that manifested itself shortly after filing for divorce.

Susan felt a daunting inadequacy at having to live without a partner after her divorce. She said that was one of the first things she thought about on filing for divorce. Helen and Dalina feared loneliness after the divorce, and it was more severe for Dalina as she felt she could not cope without a partner. In Eileen’s case, she encountered problems initially while adapting to her divorce as she had a co-dependent relationship with her ex-husband. She described how they had spent all their time together during their marriage. She had also developed the habit of addressing him in endearing terms even in public so that subsequently she had to make a conscious effort to break this habit which would be embarrassing for both of them after the divorce. Another three participants were lonely because they felt the need to have someone with them especially in time of crises. Although Felicia was independent and could manage on her own, she said she needed someone beside her during times of crisis to provide comfort and solace. Loneliness seemed to be experienced most in the evenings by Anna and Felicia and they spoke of how they were affected by it. For Anna it was particularly difficult in the first few months after divorce as she did not have suitors then. Felicia felt lonely in an empty bed.
Felicia, Participant Number 6 (Woman, Aged 49)

“I think especially at night, when you’re all alone and you feel that the other side of the bed is empty and, it will be empty from now on.”

Sub-theme 3b.1.3: Guilt (-)

Guilt was mentioned by five participants, (1, 4, 6, 8 & 9). Upon realising that the divorce was finalised both Anna and Felicia felt bad that they had initiated the divorce.

Felicia mentioned that she was indirectly responsible for her son “not having his father like other normal families.” Anna also commented: “My husband loved the children but because of my divorce they lost their father.” Dalina and Helen experienced severe guilt when their divorce was finalised as they felt they did not do enough to save the marriage.

Helen said: “Initially I felt bad that I did not go for counselling to save the marriage.”

In Iris’s case, she was not so much concerned with her family’s reaction but that of her in-laws. She described the guilt she felt towards them for going along with the annulment proposed by her husband. Iris also explained that difference in reaction was due to the differences in background of her parents and in-laws.

Iris, Participant Number 9 (Woman, Aged 30)

“It is just a lot of guilt towards his parents. His family is very traditional and conservative Chinese, business people. To them, face saving is very important and the divorce was an insult to their family.”

Sub-theme 3b.1.4: Worry and Stress (-)

As divorce impacts the whole family, two female participants (11 & 17) reported that stress over their ex-spouses’ reactions to the divorce had a negative impact on their adjustment. They worry about what their ex-spouse might do to them and their families.

Katherine was very stressed when her ex-husband wanted to fight her for the custody of their children. She described how that affected her initially.
Katherine, Participant Number 11 (Woman, Aged 51)

“When I filed for a divorce he got very upset indeed. And he created quite a big scene. And he said, ‘I want to challenge you all the way. And I want to have custody of the children.’ I think he knew the children were very close to me and he knew that was like my life wire, I felt so worried that he would take them away.”

Sub-theme 3b.1.5: Sadness (-)

Participants (4, 8, 14 & 18), three women and one man felt much sadness when the marriage was dissolved. Nancy was extremely sad when the realisation of her failed marriage hit her when the divorce was granted in court.

Nancy, Participant Number 14 (Woman, Aged 48)

“I actually felt very miserable immediately after the divorce.”

Helen described how she had responded when the divorce papers were finalised:

Helen, Participant Number 8 (Woman, Aged 36)

“I was crying uncontrollably in the courtroom. I think I was the only one crying. I was so miserable.”

Dalina spoke about her initial numbness and profound sadness:

Dalina, Participant Number 4 (Woman, Aged 45)

“My mind just went blank. I cannot think of anything, just cry and cry and cry and I was so sad that my marriage was over.”

Initially, Rajiv’s sadness affected his professional work. The church pastor said he was unable to speak inspirationally to his congregation because he was struggling with his own sadness and grief. He faced great pressure to recover quickly from his divorce. He described the struggle he had to go through.

Rajiv, Participant Number 18 (Man, Aged 38)

“It affected me more because, as a preacher, you can’t preach with pain, you cannot preach with sadness, because whatever that is taught here, it would naturally come out and you’re giving a talk, you are inspiring others, they look up to you. So then it became the hardest struggle.”
**Sub-theme 3b.1.6: Uncertainty and Confusion (-)**

Three women (8, 9 & 19) expressed feelings of ambiguity. For example, Helen could not decide whether filing for divorce was the right thing to do even though she had already proceeded with it. She kept wondering whether the issues in her marriage could still be resolved and considered going for professional counselling. When she started dating, she got further confused about whether she should stay on with the relationship or to move on. She described her initial response which included confusion and uncertainty.

**Helen, Participant Number 8 (Woman, Aged 36)**

“I date men and I have mixed feelings. I would compare every guy and I ask myself: is he better than my ex-husband?”

Uncertainty about the future had a negative impact on two other women (9 & 19). For Susan, she did not know what to do with herself now that she no longer had the role she held during her marriage.

**Susan, Participant Number 19 (Woman, Aged 44)**

“I worried about what am I going to do now? Because when I got married, I am a wife. And then, I suddenly realised, I wasn’t exactly sure who I am and what I feel.”

Iris had to join the workforce after her divorce, but was also uncertain what she wanted to do. On the one hand she felt that there were many things she needed to do, yet she was fearful of venturing into any of them. The two cases differed in that while Susan already had an established career upon divorce Iris had yet to establish one. It appears that a woman’s sense of identity and security is dependent on her having both a defined role and some financial security. An examination of the transcripts shows that having a clear sense of identity and security could help in the post-divorce adjustment.

**Sub-theme 3b.1.7: Anger (-)**

Another emotion experienced by two participants (6 & 7) was anger. Felicia described the fury that seized her in the courtroom when they went through the divorce
papers together for the first time. She made a vow to herself that she would never want to see her husband again. But, unlike Felicia, Gopal’s anger was directed at himself. He said this was because he had failed to save his marriage.

**Gopal, Participant Number 7 (Man, Aged 42)**

“I felt sad and angry with myself. Basically it’s because I couldn’t save my marriage. I wasted part of my life and nothing came out of it. I felt lonely. I am staying with my parents. I need someone by me.”

**Sub-theme 3b.1.8: Sense of Loss and Regret (-)**

Other than sadness, some participants (4, 16 & 18) also reported an initial sense of loss and regret due to their divorce. Rajiv was much affected by the loss of his ex-wife. He said this was because he had gone through a lot with her in the 15 years they were married. They had prayed together, bought their matrimonial home, struggled to pay off the debts, and in fact, did most things together. To him, she was more than a wife: she was a soul-mate and a confidante. Dalina felt the tremendous loss of her ex-husband’s physical and emotional presence. She described the difficult times when she had recurring images of him at familiar places. She would imagine him waving at her across the road. Penny felt a mixture of grief and deep regret upon her divorce, as she and her husband had been together since she was 18, and they had been married for 36 years.

**Penny, Participant Number 16 (Female, Aged 71)**

She reflected: “Initially, I was extremely sad and reluctant to let him go. We were childhood lovers. The relationship was bad and the relationship was like tasteless bones but we have to eat it and not throw it away. It would be such a waste to throw away this marriage.”

**Theme 3b.2: Physical and Psychological Distress (-)**

In the examination of changes in the physical and psychological aspects of the participants, five women and three men (3, 5, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17 & 18) reported negative outcomes post-divorce. It is quite evident from their accounts that their distress during the
adjustment period was further compounded by health issues such as headaches, pain in the chest, sleeping difficulties, eating problems, smoking and drinking.

Eileen had a serious car accident within the first three months of filing for divorce. As she had hitherto been accident-free since she started driving for several years before that, she concluded that the divorce proceedings could have affected her concentration. Latif confessed that he had insomnia after his divorce; Queenie had recurrent nightmares; Katherine had to visit the doctor for headaches, insomnia and eating problems; Mahesh admitted that he smoked and drank heavily to escape from the painful reality; and Rajiv was so stressed by the divorce that he developed indigestion followed by a gastric ulcer for which he was later hospitalized. Three participants were so adversely affected by their divorce that they fell into negative thought patterns. They poignantly described the challenges of feeling depressed, isolated and had thoughts of suicide. Mahesh sank into depression while Chitra attempted suicide twice during the 10 years since her divorce. She finally had to take medication for her depression. Katherine described how the thought of her children stopped her on the verge of leaping off an apartment block.

**Katherine, Participant Number 11 (Woman, Aged 51)**

"I was actually distressed. And the thought of ending my life and calling it all quits...Yes I did entertain it. In fact, I went up to a block of flats and when I was just sitting down there I told myself. If I am going to kill myself now what is going to happen to my children. And I cannot trust my children to be with him. I’ll be doing my children an injustice. And that thought told me that no, it’s a stupid thing to even think of dying. And I came down."

**Theme 3b.3: Family Life (-)**

The theme of family life can be discussed under three sub-themes: fear of children suffering social disapproval; father’s attitude towards the divorce; and conflicts with ex-spouse. Four women (4, 8, 11, 14 & 18), cited the responsibility of raising their children on their own as impacting negatively on their adjustment. Dalina said she worried about
having to bring up her children single-handedly as they were still young. For Katherine, the cause of her anxieties was the responsibility of being the sole breadwinner and decision-maker. Susan said that as she was a Roman Catholic the notion of breaking up a family was a very challenging experience for her.

**Sub-theme 3b.3.1: Fear of Children Suffering Social Disapproval (-)**

Three female participants (8, 11 & 14) were worried about the stigma attached to children of divorcees; they seemed to have a perception that divorcees had a lower social status. Helen said she was concerned about how her children would fare in school as it was very pro-family in orientation. The other two were anxious whether their children would be judged negatively in school. Nancy described her worries.

**Nancy, Participant Number 14 (Woman, Aged 48)**

“I worry how are my children will be viewed in school and suffering the social stigma of coming from a family with divorce parents. The children are so young and innocent and so how are they going to face the stigma in school. They have to deal with people who would comment that they come from single-parent family.”

Katherine believed her children might have to carry a negative label around with them as children from a broken family.

**Sub-theme 3b.3.2: Father’s Attitude towards the Divorce (-)**

Susan faced disapproval from her parents and relatives. Her father, who had a traditional view of marriage, could not accept her divorce. She said she could not get him to understand or support her. Thus, whether the family and others approved or disapproved the divorce would apparently affect resources or support, and to some extent the outcome of adjustment. However, Susan’s sharing reflected only her perspective and the family’s actual responses were not ascertained.

**Susan, Participant Number 19 (Woman, Aged 44)**

“I come from a very conservative family, my father always believed that everybody has to project a perfect family. And he found it difficult that his youngest daughter is getting a divorce, where it broke up his picture of his perfect family.”
Sub-theme 3b.3.3: Conflicts with Ex-spouse (-)

Rajiv struggled both with his family and ex-wife, who stayed in another room in the same flat after she filed for divorce. He said their conflict cycle continued; yet she was dependent on him emotionally and refused to let go of him. He also took custody of the two children because he felt that his wife was not emotionally competent to manage them, adding that being a single father was very difficult for him.

Rajiv, Participant Number 18 (Man, Aged 38)

“The initial negative outcome was my ex-wife would attack me and she had terrible anger. She blamed me for causing the divorce. Her behaviour towards me was like “catching the dog by the tail” and pulling me into a fight. This would happen over and over again. This was because initially after divorce we were still in the same house but different rooms. I also had to take total custody of the girl and boy.”

Theme 3b.4: Financial Issues (-)

In Singapore, many couples have become accustomed to living on two incomes. In addition, some of the participants found that after divorce, their ex-spouses were not able to provide them with sufficient financial maintenance. Therefore, the termination of marriage impelled some divorcees to become either breadwinners or be faced with securing their own financial survival and the responsibility of their dependent children. Financial issues such as lack of money were cited by four participants, three women and one man, (1, 3, 10 & 18) as a negative impact of divorce. After the marital split Rajiv, who used to share household expenses with his wife, encountered financial stress when she stopped contributing leaving him to struggle on his own. Chitra could not ask for maintenance as it was she who had initiated the divorce. She also lost out on the dowry which her family had given to her ex-husband for their arranged marriage.
Chitra, Participant Number 3 (Woman, Aged 44)

"My family requested my husband’s family in India for a divorce and that’s why we were not in the privileged position to get anything from my ex-husband. In our custom the girls give a lot of dowry and money to the man in India who is going to get married to Singapore girls. So we lost out on everything."

The last two participants, Anna and Jenny, ran businesses together with their ex-husbands during their marriage. Jenny, who decided to dissolve the business, gave her ex-husband more in the marriage settlement. Anna took over the business which she had built up and also the company’s debt incurred by her ex-husband. The debt repayment affected her subsequent financial situation.

Theme 3b.5: Fear of Involvement in Romantic Relationships (-)

This theme discusses some participants’ different attitudes to romantic relationships because of the traumatic experiences that they had gone through. Four participants, three women and one man (2, 4, 12 & 14), said that their attitude towards relationships changed after their divorce. As mentioned earlier, Betty felt that men tended to see her as an easy prey after her divorce and she began to build up her defences against them. In Dalina’s case, she became fearful of relationships after her husband’s betrayal. She believed men had evil designs on her after her divorce because they could not possibly want her for who she was. Latif was so afraid of relationships that he could not start dating after his divorce although he was free to do so. He lost the confidence that he could be a good partner because his marriage failed even though he had tried very hard to save it. He was resolved to remain single for the rest of his life. Betty who had been divorced for about a year and Dalina for nine years still remained single. An examination of the data suggests that the passage of time may not have made any difference in changing the negative view of relationships for Dalina.
Theme 3b.6: Having to Cope on their Own (-)

Two female participants (5 & 14) found they had no one to ask for help when they needed it. Eileen said she missed having someone to help with errands as she was used to before the divorce. In Nancy’s case, neither her ex-husband nor her parents were there for her. The latter did not understand why she had to get a divorce and did not help her in looking after her children. She described how she had to cope on her own.

Nancy, Participant Number 14 (Woman, Aged 48)

“There are a lot of things I cannot do on my own. The kids are so young and I have to bring them up. I have to work doubly hard. And my parents did not understand and I didn’t get any support from the family. I did everything myself.”

Part D: Indicators of Post-Divorce Adjustment

In this section, the thematic analysis of the outcomes of post-divorce adjustment identified indicators of positive and negative adjustment based on the participants’ narratives. These are further analysed as either positive or negative indicators.

The interviews provided the divorcees with the opportunity to take stock of how far they had travelled in the post-divorce adjustment process. Participants were asked to rate their post-divorce adjustment on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 as the lowest score and 10, the highest, as in Study 1. For the purpose of this study, ratings between 8 and 10 are taken as “Very Well-Adjusted”; 6-7 as “Well-Adjusted”; and 5 and below, “Still Trying to Adjust”. Table 5.13 summarises the scores together with some pertinent details about the participants. It is interesting to note that all the female participants interviewed had initiated their divorces, while out of the five male participants only Gopal and Mahesh were the initiators.
### Table 5.13

**Self-ratings of Post-divorce Adjustment by 19 Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Categories</th>
<th>Participant No., Name &amp; Sex</th>
<th>Individual Score</th>
<th>Initiated Divorce (Y = Yes) (N = No)</th>
<th>Age at Divorce</th>
<th>Age at Interview</th>
<th>No. of Years Married</th>
<th>No. of Years since Divorce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very Well-Adjusted</strong> (Score: 8 – 10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>N = 13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male = 3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Anna (F)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Betty (F)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chitra (F)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Eileen (F)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Jenny (F)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Katherine (F)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Nancy (F)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Penny (F)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Queenie (F)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Susan (F)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Gopal (M)</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Mahesh (M)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Rajiv (M)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Well-Adjusted</strong> (Score: 6 – 7)</td>
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<td>N = 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female = 2</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Helen (F)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Iris (F)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Still Trying to Adjust</strong> (Score: 1 – 5)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>N = 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female = 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male = 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dalina (F)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Felicia (F)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Latif (M)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Oscar (M)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Very Well-Adjusted (Score: 8-10)

Thirteen participants scored their own adjustment as an 8, 9 or 10, thus falling into the “Very Well-Adjusted” category (see Table 5.13). This group consisted of ten women and three men. At the time of the divorce, seven of the participants were between 30-39 years old and four were between 40-49 years old. One participant fell within the range of 20-29 and the other in the 60-69 age groups. Out of the 13 participants in this group, seven had children. Six participants were married from 11 to more than 30 years. Perhaps not surprisingly, of the 13 participants who reported themselves as “Very Well-Adjusted”, 12 of them were the initiators of their divorces, the only exception being Rajiv.

Well-Adjusted (Score: 6-7)

The “Well-Adjusted” group with a score of 6-7 consisted of two women (participants 9 & 8). One was in the 20-29 and the other in the 30-39 age groups at the time of their divorce. Both had been divorced for less than two years, and both of them were the initiators of their divorce though only one had children.

Still Trying to Adjust (Score: 1-5)

Another four participants, two women and two men (4, 6, 12 & 15), rated themselves as “Still Trying to Adjust” with a rating of 5 and below. Two participants were in the 30-39 age group at the time of divorce, one was in the 40-49 age group, and the last participant was from the 60-69 age-group. Of the four participants, three had children. Three participants had been married for 14 years, and the fourth with less than eight years.

The thematic analysis is presented in Section 4, with four sub-sections focusing on positive (+) or negative (-) indicators of internal or external adjustment.
**Section 4a: Indicators of Positive Adjustment (+)**

The thematic analysis unearthed twelve themes of positive adjustment and these are manifested in the participants’ outward behaviour and psychological as well as emotional states. They are: making a fresh start; having positive emotions; improving psychological state; willing to start dating again; regaining control with passage of time; sharing divorce experiences; enjoying spiritual growth; ceasing of self-destructive behaviours; getting married again; starting a new romantic relationship; maintaining positive relationship with ex-spouse; and drawing strength from parental role. These are shown in Table 5.14 followed by the 11 sub-themes (See Table 5.15).
### Table 5.14

**Section 4a: Main Themes: Indicators of Positive Adjustment (+)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>4a.1: Making a Fresh Start</th>
<th>4a.2: Experiencing Positive Emotions</th>
<th>4a.3: Improving Psychological State</th>
<th>4a.4: Being Willing to Start Dating Again</th>
<th>4a.5: Regaining Control with Passage of Time</th>
<th>4a.6: Sharing Divorce Experiences</th>
<th>4a.7: Enjoying Spiritual Growth</th>
<th>4a.8: Ceasing of Self-destructive Behaviours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>Participants</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Anna</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>2. Betty</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Chitra</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Dalina</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>5. Eileen</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Felicia</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Helen</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Iris</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>10. Jenny</td>
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<td>16. Penny</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total (Women)</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=9</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=8</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=8</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=6</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=3</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=2</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Participants</td>
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<td>7. Gopal</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Oscar</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Rajiv</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total (Men)</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=3</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=2</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=2</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=2</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=1</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=2</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=2</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total for all women and men</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=12</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=10</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=10</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=8</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=4</strong></td>
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<td><strong>N=4</strong></td>
<td><strong>N=1</strong></td>
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</table>
Table 5.14 continued

Section 4a: Main Themes: Indicators of Positive Adjustment (+)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Themes: N=5</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>4a.9: Getting Married Again</th>
<th>4a.10: Maintaining Positive Relationship with Ex-spouse</th>
<th>4a.11: Drawing Strength from Parental Role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female Participants (14)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Anna</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Betty</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Chitra</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Dalina</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Eileen</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Felicia</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Helen</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Iris</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Jenny</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Katherine</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Nancy</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Penny</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Queenie</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Susan</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sub-total (Women)</td>
<td>N=2</td>
<td>N=2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Male Participants (5)

| 7. Gopal | X | - | - |
| 12. Latif | - | - | - |
| 13. Mahesh | X | X | - |
| 15. Oscar | - | - | - |
| 18. Rajiv | - | - | - |
| Sub-total (Men) | N=2 | N=1 | N=0 |
| Total for all women and men | N=4 | N=3 | N=3 |
### Table 5.15

**Section 4a: Sub-themes: Indicators of Positive Adjustment (+)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4a.1: Making A Fresh Start</td>
<td>4a.1.1: Finding A Clear Sense of Identity</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4a.1.2: Developing Self-growth</td>
<td>10, 18 &amp; 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4a.1.3: Starting a New Chapter in Life</td>
<td>2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16 &amp; 19</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4a.1.4: Returning to Normal Life Again</td>
<td>1 &amp; 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a.2: Experiencing Positive Emotions</td>
<td>4a.2.1: Stabilizing of Emotions</td>
<td>2, 10, 14 &amp; 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4a.2.2: Accepting the Divorce</td>
<td>7 &amp; 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4a.2.3: Easing of Financial Worries</td>
<td>1 &amp; 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4a.2.4: Feelings of Detachment</td>
<td>2 &amp; 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4a.2.5: Absence of Negative Feelings towards Ex-spouse</td>
<td>1, 2, 5, 8, 10, 14 &amp; 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a.3: Improving Psychological State</td>
<td>4a.3.1: Improving Psychological Health</td>
<td>17 &amp; 19</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4a.3.2: Establishing A New Paradigm of Marriage</td>
<td>2, 9 &amp; 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4a.3.3: Discovering Inner Strength</td>
<td>2, 8, 11, 12 &amp; 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4a.3.4: Holding Non-stigmatising Views about Divorce</td>
<td>5 &amp; 16</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Theme 4a.1: Making a Fresh Start (+)**

Divorce was mentioned by 12 participants, nine women and three men, (1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 18 & 19) as providing closure to an unhappy episode in their lives and the start of a new chapter. For them, an important part of the adjustment process was to develop the ability to leave behind the pain of the marriage failure and divorce, and to...
take positive steps forward in rebuilding their lives. The theme of making a fresh start covered a wide range of steps taken, described here under four sub-themes: finding a clear sense of identity; developing self-growth; starting a new chapter in life; and returning to normal life. The researcher noted that of the 12 participants, ten (1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 16 & 19) were the initiators. An examination of the transcripts revealed that the participants who had instituted the legal process for divorce found closure easier. Perhaps, as initiators, they felt they had more control and awareness over the process.

**Sub-theme 4a.1.1: Finding A Clear Sense of Identity (+)**

Of the ten participants who initiated the divorce, eight of the women and one man had done so to be free of the marriage. Even for Latif, whose wife had initiated the divorce after having deserted him and cohabited with her lover, reported that eventually he came to see the positive outcome of it. Latif, who shared that he did not have a clear sense of his own identity, had always relied on his ex-wife to make decisions and throughout the seven years of marriage he was undecided as to whether he should lead or allow his wife to do so. However, since the divorce he has learned to take steps to be self-reliant and has discovered a new-found ability to be independent.

**Latif, Participant Number 12 (Man, Aged 34)**

“Decision-making – I can't do it on my own because I am too dependent on her. I see her as part of me. But now that I am alone, I feel that whatever I want to do, I just make the decision and I feel that is something which I have never experienced and I feel more empowered and strong that I did it on my own without my ex-wife.”

**Sub-theme 4a.1.2: Developing Self-growth (+)**

One male and two female participants (10, 18 & 19) saw their own self-growth after divorce, describing it as greater self-awareness and self-development. Jenny, who was in a co-dependent relationship with her ex-husband, said leaving her marriage gave her the strength to rediscover a new life pattern. Susan learnt more about herself by reflecting on
how her marriage had broken up. She reported the growth in terms of an awareness and acceptance of her vulnerability and benefiting from the learning process and experience.

Susan, Participant Number 19 (Woman, Aged 44)

“I think it has been a learning experience for me, both understanding myself and growing with it and I have grown much more than I have ever dream possible. Yes, I am most well-adjusted.”

In retrospect, Rajiv recognized that he had to take many small steps of emotional growth to believe in himself again. By that he meant he was able to trust himself again.

Rajiv, Participant Number 18 (Man, Aged 38)

“I took many small steps to believe in myself that I can stand up again. I was working harder. There were a lot of positive outcomes; emotionally, I became a stronger person. Sadly, I have learnt, I have to say that through a negative experience, it made me a better person.”

Sub-theme 4a.1.3: Starting a New Chapter in Life (+)

Of the ten participants (2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16 & 19) who made a fresh start following their divorce, two of them said they were happy that their marriages were finally over after a long wait. Betty, who had to endure a three-year separation from her husband before she could get a divorce, described how she felt on receiving her divorce papers.

Betty, Participant Number 2 (Woman, Aged 32)

“Actually I was quite elated because three years was a long waiting period before we got the absolute break. He contacted me twice, but I told him that I didn’t want to speak to him ever again. I was so glad it was over.”

Penny and Nancy saw their divorce as an absolute finality – an end to all the problems and miseries in their marriage. In Nancy’s words, she felt it was a “full stop”. Another five participants, two men and three women (7, 8, 9, 12 & 19), saw their divorce not only as a closure but also a new start. From their narratives, the immense “sense of relief” was palpable for all five of them. They were glad and excited to begin a new chapter in life. Latif said:
Latif, Participant Number 12 (Man, Aged 34)

“I felt that the bad marriage had been hanging too long. We were neither here nor there, I couldn’t move on because a string was still tied. So when it was finally done settled, I felt that, ok, I can close a chapter and start a new chapter.”

On receiving news of her divorce, Katherine was filled with joy, hope and enthusiasm at the prospect of starting life anew for herself and her children.

Katherine, Participant Number 11 (Woman, Aged 51)

“And there were a lot of things I had already planned in mind I would do. And I told myself this is it. It’s my opportunity to get out there on my own. Start a life afresh with my children and we’ll adjust along the way. And that was something that we felt was really or at least I felt was really good.”

Sub-theme 4a.1.4: Returning to Normal Life Again (+)

For the participants (1 & 18) in this study, moving on with life generally meant they could return to a normal level of stress and live life without constantly harking back to the pre-divorce period. Rajiv, a pastor, was able to continue preaching and counselling his congregation after his divorce. He believed that he had adjusted well to the dissolution of his marriage. In Anna’s case, she was able to resume a normal family life with the support of her maid who took over the domestic role so that she could focus on building her career and being the bread winner.

Theme 4a.2: Experiencing Positive Emotions (+)

Of all the themes discussed, the ability to enjoy “positive emotions” after their divorce was most reported by the “Very Well-Adjusted” group comprising six female and two male participants (1, 2, 5, 7, 10, 14, 18 &19). Correspondingly, Helen and Felicia who rated themselves as “Well-Adjusted” and “Still Trying to Adjust” felt that they were struggling to achieve positive emotional adjustment to their divorce.
Sub-theme 4a.2.1: Stabilizing of Emotions (+)

One male and three female participants (2, 10, 14 & 18) mentioned that the stabilizing of their emotions was an indicator of their positive adjustment. Jenny felt she did not have to make any emotional adjustment because emotionally she was very stable after deciding to end the marriage. But other participants mentioned they were able to let go of negative feelings towards their ex-spouses because they felt that they were no longer feeling negative about the whole experience. Rajiv, for example, felt all his anger had dissipated and could smile at his ex-wife when he met her. Similarly, Betty was certain that if she should meet her husband again she could be friendly and even be engaged in a conversation with him without any negative emotions. Similarly, this lack of ill-feeling towards the ex-spouse allowed Nancy to continue making contact with her husband, and she reported that she felt at ease as there were no awkward or romantic feelings at all.

Sub-theme 4a.2.2: Accepting the Divorce (+)

Another indicator of positive emotional adjustment was the ability to accept and come to terms with the divorce, as mentioned by two participants (7 & 19). Gopal, who was initially unsure whether he should have tried harder to save his marriage, finally agreed with his family members who advised him to accept that the marriage was over and not to allow his ex-wife to continue ill-treating him. Susan, on the other hand, was able to come to terms with her divorce quite quickly and also to learn from the traumatic event. She described the personal growth she experienced in accepting that she and her ex-husband were both responsible for the marriage dissolution.

Susan, Participant Number 19 (Woman, Aged 44)

“I have come to terms with the failure of the marriage. But I don’t regret the marriage. So I don’t hate nor blame him for anything that has happened. Neither do I blame myself. I am very aware that I contributed to the failure of the marriage myself.”
**Sub-theme 4a.2.3: Easing of Financial Worries (+)**

Anna and Susan were less stressed by financial worries after their divorce and this was a positive indicator of their adjustments. Anna, whose ex-husband’s creditors would hound him at their home at night, was relieved that her life became more peaceful without creditors invading her privacy.

**Anna, Participant Number 1 (Woman, Aged 41)**

“I no longer feel scared and insecure because financially I have become better. I need not worry that debtors are at the door-steps. Today, I am not afraid anymore!”

Although Susan did not have serious financial issues during her marriage, she was relieved that she was no longer responsible for her husband’s medical and hospital fees.

**Sub-theme 4a.2.4: Feelings of Detachment (+)**

Emotional distance not only helps people to let go of their spouse in a divorce but also allows them to gain another perspective on the issues in their marriage. In Betty’s case, she was able to achieve so much emotional distance from her divorce that it was easy for her to analyse her former marital issues dispassionately. Being relatively young and having only been married for three years facilitated her to achieve emotional distancing process.

**Betty, Participant Number 2 (Woman, Aged 32)**

“I realized I was so much stronger than I was. I realized that I was resourceful and most importantly, I realized that we were having a great time without commitment. We could only be great friends.”

In Felicia’s case, she did not have any emotional attachment to her husband as she saw very little of him during her marriage, so she found it relatively easy to let go and her adjustment to divorce was straightforward and quick.

**Felicia, Participant Number 6 (Woman, Aged 49)**

“I must admit that he was never around, he did not play an important role in my life so his absence is not really missed and I don’t feel bonded at all.”


Sub-theme 4a.2.5: Absence of Negative Feelings towards Ex-spouse (+)

The absence of negative feelings towards the ex-spouse was crucial in positive adjustment as reported by seven participants (1, 2, 5, 8, 10, 14 & 18), comprising six women and one man. Conversely, those with negative feelings towards their ex-spouses continued experiencing difficulties adjusting. Clearly, the dissipation of anger and other negative emotions towards the ex-spouse had helped to hasten the process of adjustment for several participants. Some even developed cordial and friendly relationships with their ex-spouses. Betty, for example, realised that “letting go of her anger” towards her ex-husband had allowed her to move on emotionally; and she was certain that she would be able to maintain her composure if she were to see him again. Getting over his anger with his ex-wife also allowed Rajiv to move on and resume his work as a pastor and to adjust eventually. For Helen, the absence of negative feelings provided a break from the conflict cycle. Instead of arguing frequently during their marriage, she said she and her ex-husband could now communicate with each other without rancour.

Helen, Participant Number 8 (Woman, Aged 36)

“The other thing is that after the divorce I communicate with my husband better. We could speak. We could talk and not quarrel and I would listen to him and take his advice and vice versa.”

Nancy, Eileen, Anna and Felicia within the group of seven participants even went on to establish an amicable arrangement with their ex-spouses regarding their joint responsibility for their children. Eileen and her ex-husband remained as colleagues in the same corporation and enjoyed an amicable relationship. They continued to inform each other about their shift-duty times so that she could choose whether or not to see him and also locate him whenever she needed to discuss issues related to their work. Although Felicia previously had an issue with her husband for not doing more to advance his career during their marriage, after divorce she was able to neutralize her emotions so completely
that she no longer had any expectations of him. She even helped him when he ran into
financial trouble after the divorce. Anna maintained a “decent relationship” with her ex-
husband, especially with regard to bringing up the children, and she felt that this lack of
animosity had helped her in adjusting to life after the divorce.

Anna, Participant Number 1 (Woman, Aged 41)

Researcher: “How would you describe your relationship with your husband?”
Anna: “No hatred or negative feelings.”
Researcher: “So there is an absence of negative feelings in the relationship?”
Anna: “Yes certainly – it helps me to heal.”
Researcher: “How did that help you to adjust?”
Anna: “The fact that we don’t fight, so no more toxic exchange and the kids are
happier.”

Theme 4a.3: Improving Psychological State (+)

In the examination of changes in the post-divorce health status of some participants
over time, significant improvements in psychological and physical health were reported.
These benefits were a clear signal for them that they were well on the mend from their
broken marriages. The sub-themes identified were, improving psychological and physical
health; establishing a new paradigm of marriage; discovering inner strength; and holding
non-stigmatising views about divorce.

Sub-theme 4a.3.1: Improving Psychological Health (+)

During the interview, Queenie and Susan described how their health had improved
after they filed for divorce. Queenie had suffered from nervousness, depression, a poor
appetite, insomnia and harrowing nightmares during her marriage, but she remembered
that a few months after the divorce, the distress experienced was substantially less, and she
reported that after the divorce she no longer needed any medication.

Like Queenie, Susan had a mental breakdown during her marriage. She started
experiencing symptoms of psychological distress one year after she was married and
needed hospitalization and anti-depressants to manage the symptoms of depression. She
said that she started to get better after she filed for divorce, and subsequently she made a full recovery from her symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Susan, Participant Number 19, (Woman, Aged 44)

“I wasn’t physically and mentally very well during my marriage, I had a lot of medical issues but when I left him, everything kind of sorted itself out... In fact now, my psychiatrist has completely taken off my anti-depressant medication... I am completely off medication. When I left the marriage, everything about my health issues got sorted out by itself. I think leaving him was a better option for me.”

Sub-theme 4a.3.2: Establishing a New Paradigm of Marriage (+)

Another area of self-growth mentioned by two female and one male participant (2, 9 & 18) was a greater understanding of how they could help make a relationship work. Iris realised through the divorce episode that commitment and perseverance were the only ways to avoid divorce. In her case, she regretted that she was too eager to get out of the union. Her view is echoed in the following account by Betty, who reflected on the importance of commitment through the changing phases of a marriage.

Betty, Participant Number 2 (Woman, Aged 32)

“And sometimes in life, you need certain people for a certain time but maybe you outgrow them. And I think even if we had stayed married, we probably would have outgrown each other.”

Rajiv, who married at age 21, learned about the importance of respect and understanding through the failure of his marriage. He described how through personal reflection he had gained self-awareness and people skills, and had become more mature.

Sub-theme 4a.3.3: Discovering Inner Strength (+)

Divorce also brought some participants on a road to self-discovery. Four female participants and one male (2, 8, 11, 12 & 17) said that coping with divorce made them realise they possessed more emotional strength than they previously thought. Betty found out that she was stronger and more resourceful than she dared to imagine. Helen, who had cried uncontrollably in the courtroom when her divorce was finalised, said she realised
later how strong she was in overcoming her grief. She became aware that she was ultimately responsible for her own well-being. Helen shared how she felt upon acting on her decision to dissolve the marriage.

Helen, Participant Number 8 (Woman, Aged 36)

“I think the day I made up my mind to file for a divorce, I actually felt stronger even though there was some shyness. I wanted so much to find myself again and regain self-reliance.”

While these two participants discovered their inner strength as they were coping after their divorce, Katherine realised that she was stronger than she thought when she decided to leave her marriage. She described the sense of achievement when she was able to make the all important decisions and to leave an abusive husband who had also cheated on her.

Sub-Theme 4a.3.4: Holding Non-stigmatising Views about Divorce (+)

Eileen felt that if one could view divorce without the stigma, it would contribute to the positive adjustment process. Two female participants (5 & 16) who rated themselves as “Very Well-Adjusted” had refused to let the stigma affect them. Eileen worked in a service industry where she perceived that divorces were common occurrences.

Eileen, Participant Number 5 (Woman, Aged 35)

“The era has changed whereby divorcees are condemned. It is no longer like my mother’s time whereby divorcees are being despised. I think in this service industry where I am working, there are a lot of divorcees.”

Penny, in her 70s and retired, agreed with Eileen that divorce has become a common occurrence and it has not stigmatized her. However, the two cases differ slightly in that while Eileen’s divorce was well accepted in her professional circle, Penny did not face any negative impact as she did not have to deal with any colleagues or be concerned about the society-at-large after her retirement. Thus, the reaction of the immediate community seems to be crucial to whether the divorce will be seen as a stigma by the
participant. Conversely, six participants, five women and one man (1, 3, 8, 10, 11 & 18) said the stigma of divorce impacted negatively on their adjustment.

**Theme 4a.4: Being Willing to Start Dating Again (+)**

The willingness to socialise and get involved in new dating relationships was mentioned by six women and two men (1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10 & 13) as a positive indicator of their post-divorce adjustment. Jenny was full of anticipation for the future as she discovered that she could meet new friends and explore new relationships. She provided insights into how the process of getting over her divorce was facilitated by suitors or new partners. Jenny adjusted and started dating immediately after she filed for divorce, even before she received her divorce papers. She was able to tap from both internal and external resources.

**Jenny, Participant Number 10 (Woman, Aged 40)**

“So even before the divorce was finalized I was already having fun. My social life was good... I got to meet so many people and made friends. And all these things I was deprived for a long time before.”

Iris met someone new soon after the divorce and she said that dating took her mind off the breakdown of her marriage. One of the major milestones for Helen was that she could now look forward to a new life, “fresh” relationships and new hope. Anna also felt she was making up for lost time as she had got married rather young at 20. She described how her social life had changed for the better after the divorce with dates and suitors to spice up her life. Dating also assisted Anna in her adjustment and it healed the pain of her divorce.

**Anna, Participant Number 1 (Woman, Aged 41)**

“Maybe six months later, I started to have suitors coming to me and before I knew it, I was quite in love again. That actually helped me to heal my pain very much.”
Out of the eight participants, Betty, Chitra, Mahesh and Gopal were the only participants who remarried. Mahesh shared how he was able to rebuild his life through the support of his second wife.

**Mahesh, Participant Number 13 (Man, Aged 53)**

“First I found someone who encouraged me. During that last two years I built myself up. I went back to my sales. I got myself a good job. I was doing extremely well. I had a girl who was giving me motivation, accepting me for what I am with all negative behaviours that I had in the past. Both of us keep the same strong faith which was able to build me up again.”

**Theme 4a.5: Regaining Control with Passage of Time (+)**

Susan, Katherine, Anna and Mahesh regained control of their lives with the passage of time. Susan commented that six months after walking out on her husband she regained control of herself, and it was the best thing that had ever happened to her. Katherine and her children regained control over their lives and she rated herself as “Very Well-Adjusted”.

**Katherine, Participant Number 11 (Woman, Aged 51)**

“So when I finally went through the whole divorce I did give my boss more than six months notice. I said once the divorce is all over I want to take a break. I told him, I am very tired…and I need time to heal and I need time to heal with my children.”

**Theme 4a.6: Sharing Divorce Experiences (+)**

The ability to help others undergoing divorce was mentioned by two female and one male participant (2, 11 & 13) as a positive indicator of their divorce adjustment. Betty described how she was able to offer advice on relationship issues to her friends based on her own experiences. In fact, she said that she had successfully helped two of her friends in their marriage and prevented one divorce. Katherine said she shared her experiences freely whenever she encountered people going through a divorce, without any pain or embarrassment. In this way, she managed to help friends who were going through rough
patches in their marriage. In Katherine’s case, a visible and clear external indicator of emotional adjustment was her ability to share her divorce experience with her friends who had also gone through a divorce. Katherine described how the willingness to share and to give each other mutual support facilitated her own adjustment process and those of her friends.

Katherine, Participant Number 11 (Woman, Aged 51)

“When I say I am 9 (her self-rating out of 10) what I recognize is that now when I talk about it, I don’t feel any pain. I don’t feel any emotions. I can talk about it very openly. And in fact, I use it as a learning experience for other couples or friends that I come across who are going through this. ...So that’s why I use that as a gauge for my adjustment.”

Mahesh, who was able to rebuild his life through the encouragement of his second wife, went on to conduct pre-marital counselling at his church. He described how he was able to advise others because he had learnt from his own mistakes. Mahesh and Rajiv who were both in pastoral roles were able to use their live experiences to help the church congregation.

Mahesh, Participant Number 13 (Man, Aged 53)

“I and my (second) wife are vice-counsellors. We do premarital counselling because we have learned and experienced my broken marriage. We like working with people on marital issues. We tell them marriages are not perfect but every day we work it out.”

Theme 4a.7: Enjoying Spiritual Growth (+)

Rajiv, the pastor, said that through the search for meaning in his divorce he developed greater inner strength and a stronger reconnection with God following the trials and tribulations he experienced during the divorce process. For him, spirituality provided some meaning and purpose in life.

Rajiv, Participant Number 18 (Man, Aged 38)

“I begin to have a deeper need and love for God. I became closer to Him and just concentrate on the work of God, which I was doing because that became my strength and my pull.”
Theme 4a.8: Ceasing of Self-destructive Behaviours (+)

Mahesh not only came out of depression but also managed to pull himself together and abandoned the self-destructive habits of gambling, drinking and smoking which he used to indulge in during the marital conflict.

**Mahesh, Participant Number 13, (Man, Aged 53)**

“I am a gambler, smoker and drinker from young. I could drink from 9pm to 4am as a security worker but after my divorce, on 1988 31st December I stopped gambling and drinking, I stopped smoking. Everything was finished when I got married to my second wife.”

Theme 4a.9: Getting Married Again (+)

Four participants, two women and two men (2, 3, 7 & 13) had remarried and were happy in their second marriages. Chitra said that she was happily remarried with two children and that she would be immigrating to Australia with her family. Throughout the interview, she mentioned that she was so happy that she had a second chance. For Mahesh, marrying for the second time was the clearest visible external indicator of his inner change since his divorce. He was able to leave behind all the hurt and pain of his previous marriage and embrace a new life as a family man. Considering himself “Very Well Adjusted”, he is now happily married with five children.

**Mahesh, Participant Number 13 (Man, Aged 53)**

“I came out of depression. I now have a new life partner who encouraged me. Now I am happily married with 5 children. And my wife is the support pillar to be what I am today.”

Theme 4a.10: Maintaining Positive Relationship with Ex-spouse (+)

Some participants (1, 5 & 13) had moved on so well after their divorce that they were able to maintain a cordial and amicable relationship with their ex-spouses. Mahesh and his ex-wife have accepted the reality and reconciled as friends.
Mahesh, Participant Number 13 (Man, Aged 53) said:

“She is now also happily married back in the States. I’m still in conversation with her and also accepted her new marriage.”

Theme 4a.11: Drawing Strength from Parental Role (+)

Anna realised that her post-divorce depression had a negative impact on her children. It was this concern that motivated her to pull herself together and draw strength from her role as a mother. She said that her children helped her to recover and re-prioritize her life with them. Like Anna, Katherine and Penny found meaning and purpose in their role as parents.

Anna, Participant Number 1 (Woman, Aged 41)

“Immediately after the divorce I would cry in the evening and was so depressed. My eldest son would sit there and watched me crying and yet felt so helpless. One day, I suddenly realized if I continue to do that, it will affect my two boys. So I decided to heal and show them a good example that mummy can regain her strength and I stopped dramatizing my life.”

The narratives of the divorcees reveal that many of them succeeded in growing soon after divorce, and that they experienced positive adjustment post-divorce. Nonetheless, there remain some who encountered negative experiences after the marital dissolution. The following section of this discussion explores indicators of negative adjustment post-divorce.

Section 4b: Indicators of Negative Adjustment (-)

Even as positive indicators were identified after the divorce, so were there negative ones, thus suggesting that for some of the participants, there was lingering pain and struggles as they attempt to adjust. Altogether, seven main themes were identified and they are reflected below (See Table 5.16). Under the theme “difficulties in confiding in others”, there are three other sub-themes (See Table 5.17).
Table 5.16

**Section 4b: Main Themes: Indicators of Negative Adjustment (-)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>4b.1: Difficulties in Settling Feelings of Uncertainty</th>
<th>4b.2: Difficulties in Accepting Marital Breakdown</th>
<th>4b.3: Difficulties in Trusting the Opposite Sex</th>
<th>4b.4: Difficulties in Confiding in Others</th>
<th>4b.5: Inability to Separate Psychologically from Ex-spouse</th>
<th>4b.6: Difficulties in Believing in Full Recovery</th>
<th>4b.7: Withdrawing from Social Life</th>
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Table 5.17

Section 4b: Sub-themes: Indicators of Negative Adjustment (-)

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<td>4b.4.2: Not Believing Others Would Help</td>
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<td>4b.4.3: Not Believing Others Would Care</td>
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Theme 4b.1: Difficulties in Settling Feelings of Uncertainty (-)

While Dalina experienced strong feelings of uncertainty throughout the period of post-divorce adjustment, Rajiv, who had adjusted emotionally, did not consider himself having fully adjusted as he was still struggling with the emptiness and uncertainties of his future after the divorce.

**Rajiv, Participant Number 18 (Man, Aged 38)**

“There is the emotional side of feeling and I cannot settle down immediately. I felt the emptiness, the void. Because I believe in marriage and it was indeed a 15 years marriage. It is not easy to forget her?”

Theme 4b.2: Difficulties in Accepting Marital Breakdown (-)

Oscar, despite having gone through three other divorces, rated himself as “Still Trying to Adjust” as he could not accept the breakdown of his marriage. In his opinion, his wife and he were not at fault, but rather it was the children who had caused the tension. Dalina, who had struggled accepting the marital breakdown, continued to harbour sadness and hurt. Like Dalina, Latif was emotionally attached to his ex-spouse at the time of the divorce. The difference, however, was that after four years, Latif was able to accept the
marital breakdown even though he was still not confident enough to start another intimate relationship.

**Theme 4b.3: Difficulties in Trusting the Opposite Sex (-)**

While the ability to move on in life or start a new relationship is indicative of positive adjustment, the inability to do so hinders the process of recovery. In Dalina’s case, she was so affected by her divorce that she no longer thought men would want her. She remembered that her ex-husband had told her men would desire her body only and not her as a person; hence, her distrust for men. Furthermore, she rationalised that with children still so young, her prospects of remarrying were most remote. Dalina considered herself as Still Trying to Adjust despite the lapse of nine years after her divorce.

**Dalina, Participant Number 4 (Woman, Aged 45)**

“Like…a guy told me that whoever wants to get to know you and get close to you, it’s just because of your body and the house you have and that hurts me. Your children are just baggage. And my husband told me the same thing, so all these are in my mind until now, so I cannot trust men and cannot move forward.”

**Theme 4b.4: Difficulties in Confiding in Others (-)**

In the post-divorce recovery process, participants who received support from family, friends and colleagues were seen to make more positive and quicker adjustments. Conversely, Dalina, Iris, Nancy and Oscar who, for personal reasons, chose not to turn to others for help and support, were among the least well-adjusted of the group. Under this theme, three further sub-themes were noted: fear of embarrassment; difficulties in believing others could help; and difficulties in believing that others would care.

**Sub-theme 4b.4.1: Fear of Embarrassment (-)**

Dalina said she did not reach out to others given her reserved personality and fear of being despised. However, keeping to herself made her feel worse and she described how
anxious she felt even at home. Among the 19 participants, Dalina had the greatest
difficulty coping and adjusting post-divorce. She chose not to confide in others about her
divorce because of her feeling of shame over her divorce. Her inability to overcome her
shame was an indication that she had not adjusted well to her divorce.

**Sub-theme 4b.4.2: Not Believing Others Would Help (-)**

Oscar, who reported that he was still trying to adjust after many years of marital
dissolution, chose not to get family or social support because he thought confiding in
others would not be helpful, but instead would only make things worse. He believed that
an outsider would not know the facts nor understand the intense emotions involved. His
philosophy in life was that matters concerning a husband and wife should be resolved
between them without external interference.

**Oscar, Participant Number 15, (Man, Aged 65)**

“Third party won’t know so much about the story that either party will hide it and
no one will tell people about your weak point. You always tell people how good you are. So
a friend, the relative or family members may try to help, they will not get the actual
picture. The moment they put their hands in, they will make the whole thing worse, this is
my experience.”

**Sub-theme 4b.4.3: Not Believing Others Would Care (-)**

Both Iris and Nancy believed that friends and colleagues would not only be unable
to help but also be unable to keep matters confidential, thus adversely risking their well-
being as individuals.

**Nancy, Participant Number 14 (Woman, Aged 48)**

“I don’t think there are any positive things coming out of a divorce. Your marriage is
already broken and there are a lot of things that we have to face and adjust. But I just feel
that the people around me especially the colleagues they are not concerned about my
feelings. No point talking to them because once you tell them about it, words will spread
and then you won’t have a peace of mind.”
Theme 4b.5: Inability to Separate Psychologically from Ex-spouse (-)

Like Oscar, Dalina could not accept that her marriage was over even though it had ended eleven years ago. She thought of her ex-husband constantly even though he had abused her repeatedly and had numerous affairs. She continued to focus on the romantic aspects of the marriage, and this bonding prevented her from coming to terms with the divorce. The surreal romantic attachment is reflected in the transcript where she unabashedly confessed her unending love for her ex-husband.

*Dalina, Participant Number 4, (Women, Aged 45)*

“I believe my love for him is too strong. I still miss him, wherever I go I can see him, especially those places we used to go. There was never any quarrel. In fact, our love making was so good and I often would just hug him and kept telling him over and over again you are mine. What will I be without a man in my life? All these years, there’s always a man in my life.”

Theme 4b.6: Difficulties in Believing in Full Recovery (-)

Dalina also believed that full-recovery was not an option for her because she could not let go her ex-spouse. Similarly, Iris, who considered herself as “Well-Adjusted”, still experienced the weight of the emotional baggage from her divorce. She believed complete adjustment was not possible for anyone and described how deeply it had affected her.

*Iris, Participant Number 9 (Woman, Aged 30)*

“I don’t think that is really possible for any normal human to have a full adjustment of 10. In my case if I really don’t love that person so I think it will be fair to say I’m adjusting fairly well but I still feel something so therefore I think that should be a 7. I think in a way I have an emotional baggage as a result of this incident. First of all, I have sleep problem. I need the TV to fall into sleep. I was getting shorter sleep. I think the stress factor went up to such a point that I was diagnosed to have a very bad ulcer in the stomach; I was admitted into the hospital.”

Theme 4b.7: Withdrawing from Social Life (-)

Of all the participants, Dalina seemed to have had the greatest difficulty in coming to terms with her divorce. The negative impact on her was so strong that she not only
retained deep feelings for her ex-husband after nine years but also withdrew herself and her children from the outside world and imprisoning herself in her own home.

**Dalina, Participant Number 4 (Woman, Aged 45)**

“After 9 years, I give myself a 4 (her self-rating out of 10). It wasn’t easy. I am not able to confide in friends. Because of shame, I don’t want anybody in my office to know. So going to work is like wearing a mask. And my home, I don’t feel like a home. After I fetched the children from the childcare, I reached home, I’ll clean them up, and we will hide in the room. I don’t even dare to go to the balcony and outside. It is so… so dark and I don’t know how to describe it.”

Having examined the narratives of the divorcees for indicators of both positive and negative adjustment, it can be seen that Dalina has experienced six of the seven themes mentioned in Table 5.16. This perhaps explains why even after nine years following her divorce, she has continued to perceive herself as still not having adjusted well.

**Part E: Factors Contributing to Post-divorce Adjustment**

This section explores the factors that contribute to positive and negative post-divorce adjustment. The factors derived from the thematic analysis are categorised according to whether they are positive or negative factors, in keeping with the questions asked during the semi-structured interviews with the 19 participants.

**Section 5a: Factors Contributing to Positive Adjustment (+)**

Based on the interviews with the 19 participants, six factors have been identified as contributing to positive adjustment (See Table 5.18). The six main themes reflect a set of beliefs, attitudes and feelings held by the participants with regard to what they thought and felt were contributing factors to positive adjustment. It is interesting to note that among the six themes, three themes: having a positive outlook; practising self-reflection; and preoccupation with child-raising, were derived only from the women’s narratives.
Table 5.18

Section 5a: Main Themes: Factors Contributing to Positive Adjustment (+)

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<th>Participants</th>
<th>5a.1: Having a Positive Outlook</th>
<th>5a.2: Practising Self-reflection</th>
<th>5a.3: Sources of Social Support</th>
<th>5a.4: Engaging in Meaningful Activities</th>
<th>5a.5: Focusing on Career</th>
<th>5a.6: Preoccupation with Child-raising</th>
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Table 5.19

Section 5a: Sub-themes: Factors Contributing to Positive Adjustment (+)

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<td>5a.3.7 Support Groups for Divorcees</td>
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Theme 5a.1: Having a Positive Outlook (+)

Having a positive outlook was identified by nine female participants (1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 11, 14 & 17) who cited internal resources as contributing to their positive adjustment. Eight of these participants rated themselves as “Most Well-Adjusted” and one as “Well-Adjusted”. Anna, Helen, Queenie and Nancy accepted divorce as an experience from which they had to move on. For Helen, it was a matter of seeing things positively. Likewise, Chitra did not focus on the negative outcome of her annulment which was stigmatization within her conservative Indian community. She chose to focus instead on how she could overcome the stigmatisation and gain the respect of her community despite being a divorcee. Betty also focused on the positive outcome of her divorce: she saw it as a learning experience rather than an albatross hanging round her neck. “Very Well-
Adjusted” Jenny was so ready to end her marriage that she focused entirely on the positive outcomes right from the time she filed for divorce. By looking forward to the positive gains after divorce, such as freedom, absence of conflicts, ability to start anew and rediscovery of self, she was able to move on and start dating other men even before her divorce was finalised. From these narratives, these women obviously had the determination and strength to set their own agenda and take charge of their lives, thereby contributing to their early positive adjustment after divorce.

Helen, Participant Number 8 (Woman, Aged 36)

“Personally, I feel that divorce is a very unfortunate thing, but there are positive outcomes and it really depends on how you manage it. You can feel afraid and lonely and you won’t know what’s going to happen, but at the same time you find that you are independent and you can still have better relationship with friends so it’s how you really manage and it how you look at it positively.”

Theme 5a.2: Practising Self-reflection (+)

Self-reflection also helped three female participants (11, 17 & 19) in the “Most Well-Adjusted” group to come to terms with the breakdown of their marriage. Queenie said she started reading self-help books after her divorce. Her reading helped her to understand the issues in her marriage, in turn enabling her to come to terms with the reasons for her ex-husband’s sexual abuse. With understanding came acceptance and empathy, leading to less painful adjustment. Susan started reflecting on herself and her marriage while attending a support group programme at church. Through this process, she was able to understand and accept how her marriage had broken down. This observation helps explain the process of growth Susan and Anna went through as a result of their personal reflections.

Susan, Participant Number 19 (Woman, Aged 44)

“I was able to reflect on the marriage, what went wrong, how it went wrong. I was able to accept my part in the failure in the marriage. But more importantly, I was able to
Theme 5a.3: Sources of Social Support (+)

There were many sources of support cited by the divorcees that had helped them to adjust post-divorce. This theme addresses various forms of social support from which the divorcees received help. Support was the most widely mentioned factor in positive adjustment after divorce, being cited by 14 of the 19 participants. Conversely, the lack of this support was cited by five participants as a reason for their negative adjustment after divorce. Support came from a variety of sources: family, friends, spiritual helper, colleagues, employer, domestic helper, professional help, and support groups.

Sub-theme 5a.3.1: Support from Own Family (+)

Ten of the participants (1, 2, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17 & 19), nine women and one man, said they were able to count on their families after divorce. At the time of the interview, seven considered themselves “Very Well-Adjusted”, two “Well-Adjusted” and one “Still Trying to Adjust”. Another two participants who were not able to draw support from their families mentioned they adjusted with difficulties to their divorce. While one was from the “Still Trying to Adjust” group, the other was from the “Very Well-Adjusted” group. Such narratives reveal that the understanding, help and concern shown by family members are important to the healing process. Katherine said her mother’s broad-mindedness and support helped her to cope better with her post-divorce adjustment. Her family supported her emotionally by validating her “worth” while she was undergoing her divorce, instead of allowing her to feel like a “failure”. They also supported her in more practical ways such as looking after her children.
Katherine, Participant Number 11 (Woman, Aged 51):

“In fact it was my mum who actually instigated the divorce. She said, ‘What are you waiting for? Go and file it.’ My mum was from China and she’s old-fashioned and very conservative. For her to suggest this I feel my whole family was really behind me.”

Increased closeness with family members was also reported by Queenie and Betty and this bond, they commented, was crucial to the adjustment. Betty’s family took great efforts to cheer her up, and did not want her to become depressed. In addition to emotional support given, Susan’s parents took care of her children and Susan’s siblings prevented her ex-husband from harassing her. In Anna’s case, her brother-in-law also helped her with her children and included them in his family life. Their family members’ words of empathy, compassion and understanding went a long way to give the participants at least some measure of comfort. When Latif’s family found out that he was going through a divorce; his parents spoke to him words of assurance that showed their acceptance and support. More than that, he not only was able to get the support of his parents but also that of his parents-in-law. Although the latter did not approve of his divorce initially, they eventually accepted that it was inevitable despite his best efforts at reconciliation. They knew their daughter did not reciprocate his attempts at reconciliation. Family support was also a factor cited by three participants as contributing to their adjustment. Helen was grateful that her family and friends were there for her. They were not moralising but gave her objective advice and unconditional support. For Iris, emotional support from her family came in the form of letting her know that they loved her no matter what she might decide to do. This strong and non-judgmental assurance gave her great comfort and solace.

Iris, Participant Number 9 (Woman, Aged 30)

“My family gave me very good emotional support so that really help. I knew that through times like this no matter what I did; what decision I made they did not judge me and they still love me for who I am. They don’t care whether I am divorced.”
The support from grown-up children helped two participants, both women (16 & 17) in their positive adjustment. Penny confirmed how her children supported her during the divorce.

**Penny, Participant Number 16 (Woman, Aged 71)**

“*My son and daughter…they support me… My daughter didn’t like what her father was doing to me. She felt that I should have divorced him earlier. My son kept asking me. ‘Why don’t you divorce him?’ He said that such father is useless.*”

Another two participants also gained strength from their children’s understanding and efforts to be independent. Queenie described how her grown-up children’s support aided in her adjustment. They were sensible and did well in their studies, giving her much consolation and joy. Anna was able to cope better with financial and other issues because she knew her children were very supportive towards her.

**Sub-theme 5a.3.2: Support from Friends (+)**

Other than family support, friends were cited as a major source of social support for adjustment. Of the six participants, four women and two men, (1, 5, 6, 12, 18 & 19) who specified the importance of friends’ support in recovery from divorce, four rated themselves as “Very Well-Adjusted” and the other two, “Still Trying to Adjust”. Felicia also recalled that a friend who had gone through a divorce herself was very helpful and supportive and even accompanied her throughout the divorce proceedings. Eileen also described how she derived strength and encouragement from her friends, and in particular one friend who was recently divorced was instrumental in facilitating the healing process.

**Eileen, Participant Number 5 (Woman, Aged 35)**

“*My friends are so very helpful. They actually said that they would see me anytime. “Yes, I have very good friends to talk over it. My friend was divorced a few months ahead of me. She was always telling me no point in clinging on; find your own future.”*”

Another way friends helped the participants in their adjustment was by spending time with them. Rajiv, a pastor, depended on preaching engagements for his income.
However, he could not speak to inspire others while he was experiencing sadness and pain from his own divorce. He felt the pressure to recover quickly, especially since his wife had stopped contributing financially to the family after filing for divorce. Rajiv recounted how his friends encouraged him to take his time to adjust and to remain positive. He believed that spending time with this group of supportive friends had greatly eased his stress. Similarly, Latif had clearly benefited from his friends’ understanding and encouragement. He believed that they understood the pain process and they gave him hope.

Anna’s friends included her children in their personal and social activities. In addition, they helped to solicit professional counselling help for her children and even her overseas friends helped her. All this help and caring support from friends greatly reassured her. For Susan, part of her adjustment was attributed to acceptance from friends. She described how much this had helped her.

Susan, Participant Number 19 (Woman, Aged 44)

“Throughout my marriage, I was belittled and was told that I didn’t know what I was doing and my father did the same when I was growing up. And, therefore having friends accepting me for who I am and respecting my thoughts and my decisions – that really boosted my self-esteem.”

Sub-theme 5a.3.3: Religious and Spiritual Support (+)

Religious and spiritual institutions may provide support to individuals in a number of ways as indicated by two female and two male participants (1, 13, 18 & 19). These participants, who were in the “Very Well-Adjusted” group, were all Christians/Catholic. Rajiv, a pastor, found solace through a closer connection with God after his divorce. The other three participants rediscovered their faith through the encouragement of their families and friends. Anna realised that attending church with her family strengthened ties with her immediate family and relatives. She said her faith also aided in her healing process. In Mahesh’s case, he went back to church with the help of a lady whom he met after his divorce. He said she was the only one who knew how to help him. He added that it was
through his faith and her encouragement that he got over his depression. Susan’s mother took her to church when she returned to her parents’ home after she decided to end her marriage. It was there that she found a support group for divorcees. She described how God sent her help when she asked for it.

Susan, Participant Number 19 (Woman, Aged 44)

“The major thing that really helped me was my mother, she took me to church. I spent the first 5 months, trying to ask God for help and guidance. I didn’t know what I was headed for, and I asked God for help and God sent me something. He sent me people in the form of a support group for divorcees.”

Sub-theme 5a.3.4: Support from Employer (+)

In Katherine’s case, her employer contributed to her adjustment by being very understanding in giving her time off to attend to her personal affairs. She was appreciative of his support.

Katherine, Participant Number 11 (Woman, Aged 51)

“My boss was very helpful. After the divorce, I told him there will be moments when I have to run out suddenly because my son needs me. He was very nice about it. He gave me space and time to cope with the divorce. He gave me time off.”

Sub-theme 5a.3.5: Support from Domestic Helper with Role Responsibilities (+)

In Singapore it is a common practice for families with young children to employ full-time domestic helpers to assist with the many tasks and responsibilities of daily living. This is particularly useful for women divorcees who have to juggle between work and family responsibilities, especially in looking after children and providing for domestic stability. Anna cited how her domestic helper helped her resume living a normal family life, in essence redefining the family roles.

Anna, Participant Number 1, (Woman, Aged 41)

“I have a really good house maid. She is really good, making the family look quite normal. Now the family is like she is the mother of the house and I am like a husband of the house. I bring in the bread and butter.”
Sub-theme 5a.3.6: Support from Professional Services (+)

Professional assistance was another major source of formal help reported by three women (1, 3 & 14). Nancy sought professional help from the lawyers in her law firm as she was working as an administrator for them. Chitra was experiencing physical and psychological post-divorce problems and she sought medical and counselling help from her family physician.

Chitra, Participant Number 3 (Woman, Aged 44)

“I had physical ailment. The doctor was a very good counsellor besides attending to my illness she also provided informal counselling. At that time counselling was a taboo. But the doctor would always see me without fail during her lunch time. She would wait for me even when I worked late. She was a wonderful doctor.”

Similar sentiments were shared by Anna who had benefited from seeing a counsellor to get over her depression.

Sub-theme 5a.3.7: Support Groups for Divorcees (+)

Belonging to a support group for divorcees can provide an important network for personal adjustment and growth, enabling the members to draw mutual support from each other to foster the journey towards healing and self-determination. Three participants, all women, (5, 11 & 19) explained how they found such support groups to be useful. Eileen turned to other divorcees within her service industry that had formed peer support groups within the organisation. Katherine and Susan derived their support from their church cell counselling groups, and according to Susan, “It’s the best thing that ever happened to me”. She described how her support group of divorcees and leader contributed to her adjustment, not only through supportive understanding of what she was going through, but also by helping her to manage her emotions.

Susan, Participant Number 19 (Woman, Aged 44)

“The most important thing was being with people who understood what you were going through and not judging. All of us are divorcees. And the sharing between us was important. And because we are with the group, I was not alone in this. So going through
Theme 5a.4: Engaging in Meaningful Activities (+)

Another way of coping with life changes was to fill leisure time with meaningful activities. Some of these activities occurred in organized settings (e.g., line-dancing, religious activities and attending courses). Such activity may lead to the possibility of meeting new friends which might further help adjustment (Kitson, 1992). Other activities that were found to be both meaningful and helpful were reading self-help books, caring for children and going to church. Engaging in meaningful activities was mentioned by participants across all groups as a factor in positive adjustment. Out of the eight participants, seven women and one man (1, 2, 3, 7, 10, 14, 16 & 17) who had availed themselves to meaningful activities all rated themselves as “Very-Well-Adjusted”. Rebuilding the home and family life were also meaningful activities that helped two participants make positive adjustment post-divorce. For Anna, engaging in activities with her family and friends was not so much a distraction but a means of enriching her life. She enjoyed her typical Sunday routine.

Anna, Participant Number 1 (Woman, Aged 41)

“In the morning I go to church with my family and in the afternoon, the kids have some activities like tuition, and I will go for high tea with my family. When they come back it’s time for dinner and then we get ready for the next day. That’s our weekend.”

In Betty’s case, another way of coping with loneliness and life changes was to fill her leisure time with activities, both structured and unstructured. She explained how the hobbies and leisure activities kept her from dwelling on her divorce.

Betty, Participant Number 2 (Woman, Aged 32)

“But I was not going to sit and mope anyway. I would join yoga classes, read, listen to music, sew and do some research for the course that I have signed up for.”

For three participants, all women, (14, 16 & 17), it was a combination of different
activities that kept them occupied. Penny led an active life to fill her free time.

**Penny, Participant Number 16 (Woman, Aged 71)**

“So I looked after my grandchildren, volunteer work, help friend, visit the old aged home, there are many things to do.”

Nancy distracted herself by working long hours at her job, taking care of her children, and doing household chores. However, she said it was not just distraction she was After but rather that such work tired her, helping her to fall asleep easily. Queenie took care of her children, spent time with friends, went to the community centre for karaoke singing, met new friends, and participated in volunteer work. She saw these activities not as mere distractions but as her life structure and meaning.

**Theme 5a.5: Focusing on Career (+)**

Seven women and three men (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 13, 14 & 18), said that they focused more energy on their career after their divorce. Five of them kept their minds off their divorce through work and career, for different reasons. Nancy said she worked very hard to divert her attention away from the divorce, and confessed that she literally drowned herself in work. For Jenny, work was not so much a distraction but a meaningful activity. She described how work gave her life structure, and how in pouring her energies into her work helped heal the wounds post-divorce.

**Jenny, Participant Number 10 (Woman, Aged 40)**

“But I think having a job would help a lot. Your time is structured from morning to evening. Your mind is occupied and it doesn’t float all over the place, you can focus on your task at work. That’s important.”

Betty, who started on a new job after her divorce, said her work took away the pain of her divorce. She found it exciting to learn new things and adjust to a new corporate culture and colleagues, taking away the major sting of divorce. In Anna’s case, her passion for her work was not so much a distraction as part of what she enjoyed in her life after
divorce. She found it a great joy working with colleagues, servicing clients and brainstorming with associates. Her work was not merely filling up her time, but it was important to her because it was meaningful and gave her a purpose in life. Soon after Felicia lost her role as a wife, a work crisis helped her to manage her divorce, keeping her so busy that she did not have the time or inclination to deal with her feelings. She felt that as the crisis in her company involved the livelihood of about 50 people that was more important than her own personal problem.

Two participants, Eileen and Gopal, whose work required them to travel frequently, felt as if they had also left their problems in Singapore when they were away. But while they were glad to go abroad, invariably when they returned home the pain and tears would return too. While work is traditionally the main focus of men, six of the ten participants who cited this as a distraction from their divorce were women. Perhaps this is because men typically do not see piling more energy into work as a coping strategy but rather as part of their normal routine. In contrast, women who have to juggle home and work demands during marriage, would notice if they are focusing more on their career after their marriage ends. Mahesh and Rajiv who took up pastoral work found new meanings in their new found careers.

**Theme 5a.6: Preoccupation with Child-raising (+)**

Other than work, spending time with children was mentioned by three female participants, (1, 4 & 14) as a meaningful activity they occupied themselves with after their divorce. Both Anna and Dalina were obviously very involved in the upbringing of their children. These women saw their children as a source of motivation and joy, keeping them busy and helping to take their mind off the pain of divorce.
Anna, Participant Number 1 (Woman, Aged 41)

“The boys had been keeping me so occupied; I think I have no time to think about the divorce I think my children give me a lot of joy, many things to look forward to especially watching them growing up. That is one thing that I focus on.”

Positive factors emerged as crucial contributors to the post-divorce adjustment process. Both internal and external factors were seen to play a part in this healing journey. Some internal factors such as having a positive outlook and practising self-reflection were drawn from the participants themselves. Other participants went out actively to seek for assistance, nurturance, help and support for physical, social, and emotional welfare or their well-being. Such accounts reveal the emotionally positive and practical experiences of the divorcees following the intervention of the external factors that contributed to their positive adjustment.

The 19 women were coded a total of 40 times across the six themes, yielding an average of 2.1 times per woman. This suggests that the female participants availed themselves of many opportunities to seek internal and external factors to achieve positive adjustment. This, in turn, contributed to their post-divorce adjustment in a positive way.

Section 5b: Factors Contributing to Negative Adjustment (-)

Just as certain positive factors play a part in helping divorcees adjust to their divorce, so too do other unhelpful factors have a negative impact on them. The negative factors affected 15 participants, eleven women and four men (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 & 18). Despite this, ten of these participants rated themselves as “Very Well-Adjusted” and two considered themselves “Well-Adjusted”. Dalina, Felicia and Latif rated themselves as “Still Trying to Adjust”. This and other factors relating to negative adjustment are grouped under eight themes: viewing divorce as a personal failure; experiencing negative emotions; fearing negative perception by others; being blamed for
the divorce; having to cope as a single parent; lacking of family support; being harassed by unknown callers; and lacking of financial security (see Table 5.20). There were also eight sub-themes as reflected in Table 5.21. It is interesting to note that Dalina and Katherine, who continued to struggle the most with adjustment, was identified with the most number of themes contributing to negative adjustment, while three of the women (16, 17 & 19) and one man (15) did not report encountering any of these negative themes.

Table 5.20

Section 5b: Main Themes: Factors Contributing to Negative Adjustment (-)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>5b.1: Viewing Divorce as a Personal Failure</th>
<th>5b.2: Experiencing Negative Emotions</th>
<th>5b.3: Fear of Negative Judgement by Others</th>
<th>5b.4: Being Blamed for the Divorce</th>
<th>5b.5: Having to Cope as a Single Parent</th>
<th>5b.6: Lack of Family Support</th>
<th>5b.7: Being Harassed by Unknown Callers</th>
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Female Participants (14)
Table 5.20 continued

**Section 5b: Main Themes: Factors Contributing to Negative Adjustment (-)**

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Table 5.21

**Section 5b: Sub-themes: Factors Contributing to Negative Adjustment (-)**

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<td>5b.2: Experiencing Negative Emotions</td>
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<td>5b.2.4 Loneliness</td>
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<td>5b.3.2: Facing Social Stigma</td>
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<td>5b.3.3: Facing Gossip</td>
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</table>
Theme 5b.1: Viewing Divorce as a Personal Failure (-)

One factor mentioned by nine participants, five women and four men, (1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13 & 18) as contributing to negative adjustment was their view of divorce as a personal failure. Among these participants, six rated themselves as “Most Well-Adjusted” and three as “Still Trying to Adjust”. Dalina, Felicia and Latiff rated themselves as “Still Trying to Adjust”. Latif and Gopal blamed themselves for causing the divorce and consequently they experienced considerable difficulty in moving forward after the divorce. They tended to label themselves as “not good enough” and “a failure”. Latif believed that divorce also meant he had failed the expectations he had set for himself of settling down as a family man at his age.

**Latif, Participant Number 12 (Man, Aged 34)**

“Well, I am 34 and life is still not settled, I feel...lost... when I looked back, I looked at my peers, my friends, at that age, they have a family, they have happiness and everything, but I felt that I don’t have anything and I feel so bad,... maybe I see divorce as a failure. When you failed something, you feel bad so maybe that was the reason.”

Gopal also saw himself as a failure: he felt it ironic that although he was giving advice to his colleagues and juniors about managing family problems, he was unable to salvage his own marriage. He felt this to be a great embarrassment and a reflection of his incompetence and inadequacy.

For Katherine, her sense of failure was related to her “need to be perfect”. She said she had lived a “charmed” life from young, doing well in her studies and being the first in the family to attend university. Her parents were absolutely proud of her, but the divorce was a big blow to her; hence, she felt herself to be a dismal failure.

Felicia and Mahesh also considered themselves as failures. Felicia believed firmly that she was inadequate and had let her son down by not providing him with a complete family. She was guilt-stricken whenever they met other families in public or in restaurants, inevitably comparing herself with those families. Mahesh too was very harsh on himself as
though he was simply not good enough in wealth, looks, and ability. He had to hide his depression and shut himself off from society as an initial result of the divorce. Anna blamed herself for contributing to the marriage breakdown by being temperamental and not communicating well with her husband, thus adding to the existing problems that they were already facing. Rajiv lamented that he did not have the maturity to cope with his wife’s emotional outburst. In the case of Dalina, there was a great deal of self-blame for not having been able to salvage her marriage and accepting her husband’s second wife.

**Theme 5b.2: Experiencing Negative Emotions (-)**

An examination of the emotions encountered by five women (4, 6, 9, 11 & 14) and two men (7 &12) in this research seems to indicate that divorcees in general harbour deep feelings of hurt, confusion, despair, guilt, and distress about the end of their marriage; and these feelings in turn, affect their positive adjustment. These same negative emotions were echoed by several of the participants.

**Sub-theme 5b.2.1: Feelings of Victimization (-)**

While Gopal, Katherine and Latiff revealed that they saw themselves as failures, Nancy perceived herself as a victim of the marriage and divorce. Although she rated herself as “Very Well-Adjusted”, she felt betrayed, cheated and confused. Nancy was stuck because she could not accept the circumstances in which the divorce happened. She seemed not to have reached the stage of acceptance even after 18 years following her divorce.

**Nancy, Participant Number 14 (Woman, Aged 48)**

“I was upset because I felt that I am a well-behaved person. I don’t flirt with any men. I behaved well. I worked so hard. I contributed to the family. I put in so much effort to build the home. And why is he doing such things to me? Some people they go pub, they drink, they don’t behave themselves. Some flirt around and yet their husbands still treat them very nice. But why does this happen to me.”
Sub-theme 5b.2.2: Uncertainty about the Future

In Iris’s case, it was uncertainty about the future that caused her to become stressed. Iris, who rated herself as “Well-Adjusted”, said that she felt caught between the desire to move forward and the fear of making the wrong decision about post-divorce life and work.

Iris, Participant Number 9 (Woman, Aged 30)

“I think probably I felt that my life had a lot of uncertainties because at that time I wasn’t working... a lot of things that needed me to do and I didn’t want to jump into anything. It’s just a lot of uncertainties and pressure.”

Sub-theme 5b.2.3: Guilt towards In-laws

Guilt towards her in-laws also affected Iris’s adjustment. They were from a more traditional background where divorce was uncommon; hence, she was concerned how they would be affected by the divorce.

Iris, Participant Number 9 (Woman, Aged 30)

“I don’t think it’s a taboo. But it’s just a lot of guilt towards his parents. My own parents are okay. They are just concerned about whether I was happy or not.”

Sub-theme 5b.2.4: Loneliness

Loneliness was another contributing factor to negative adjustment. Two participants, both women (4 & 6) said they had coped badly with their divorce because they were lonely. Dalina expressed anxiety about losing the husband on whom she had relied for almost everything. She felt helpless without a man in her life, even nine years after divorce. Felicia, although rather independent and strong, said she missed having someone to keep her company especially during stressful times. She described how alone she felt when she had to cope with crises on her own.

Felicia, Participant Number 6 (Woman, Aged 49)

“I am very independent. But, in certain situation, it’s good to have somebody around, you know. One night after the divorce, I had to send my mother to the hospital in an ambulance. I felt so lonely, so lost. How I wished I had somebody there with me. And the time when I stayed by my mother’s bed-side, you know, looking after her throughout the night all by myself. If only he was there!”
Sub-theme 5b.2.5: Feelings of Hopelessness (-)

Latif, a participant in the “Still Trying to Adjust” group, said losing his self-confidence in relationships contributed to his negative adjustment. He described how he viewed relationships after his divorce.

Latif, Participant Number 12 (Man, Aged 34)

“I felt hopeless, I felt bad and maybe I should just stay single for the rest of my life. Maybe marriage is not for me; maybe I just cannot handle a marriage; I cannot be a good husband.”

Theme 5b.3: Fear of Negative Judgement by Others (-)

Helen was so conscious of others’ perceptions that she was not sure if she should identify herself as a divorcee. Jenny described how she hesitated to indicate she was a divorcee each time she had to complete a form. She was afraid how others would perceive her if they discovered that she was a divorcee. Hence, she was not sure if she had adjusted because she was still trying to grapple with the negative connotation that came with the word, “divorcee”.

Jenny, Participant Number 10 (Woman, Aged 40)

“It is so difficult to fill up a form and this awkward feeling that there is some negative connotation to that term divorcee... there is like a label... Like gay or something. And this group of people have stereotyped us for example as failure in life.”

Sub-Theme 5b.3.1: Being Perceived as Easy Sex Prey (-)

Betty and Dalina believed that men perceived them as an easy prey after divorce. Betty shared that men assumed she was lonely as a divorcee and was thus in need of company, love and sex. She mentioned some incidents when she knew they were looking at her with sexual intent, adding that even former male colleagues and friends had the temerity to make indecent proposals to her.

Betty, Participant Number 2 (Female, Aged 32)

“I actually had men making indecent proposal, they said we could go to Sydney together and 'no strings attached’. You know, I could pay for your trip.’ My jaw almost dropped and I felt insulted.”
Sub-theme 5b.3.2: Facing Social Stigma (-)

Divorce is still sometimes seen as a social stigma in most Asian societies today; hence, it is not surprising that six participants, five women and one man (1, 3, 8, 10, 11 & 18), reported that it had a negative effect on their adjustment. Jenny and Chitra were quite troubled by the innuendos, while the rest tried to conceal the fact – at least initially. Chitra had to face very negative reactions from her husband’s conservative Indian community as her husband and family of origin were from India when she filed for divorce.

Chitra, Participant Number 3 (Female, Aged 44)

“It wasn’t very easy for us to file the divorce and everybody in the Indian village thought that we were too modern and they thought I was a slut.”

While the rest of the participants were concerned about possible discrimination, Chitra shared that she was immediately treated differently by her husband’s conservative community. Following her divorce she was no longer invited or allowed to perform certain roles which she had been doing within her community. Four other participants (1, 8, 11 & 18) were so wary of the stigma that they did not want to be identified as a divorcee. Anna, whose children of school-going age needed to complete annual school data forms, said she was uncomfortable letting the teachers know she was a single parent. She resented the label “divorcee” and preferred to be addressed as a “Mrs” instead. Like Helen, she felt she would be stigmatised. Rajiv also wanted to be known as single and not divorced, adding that the stigma would affect people’s perception of his professional work as a church pastor. Katherine said she eventually adjusted and accepted her status as a divorcee, but it took her a while to do so. She has since ticked “divorced” in the forms she has had to complete. An examination of the transcripts suggests that the women participants were more concerned about stigma than the male.
**Sub-theme 5b.3.3: Facing Gossip (-)**

Gossip had a negative impact on the adjustment of three female participants (5, 11 & 14), although all of them rated themselves as “Very Well-Adjusted”. Nancy, whose divorce was handled by one of the lawyers in her law firm, did not trust her colleagues enough to confide in them. She described how she saw them.

**Nancy, Participant Number 14 (Woman, Aged 48)**

“But I just feel that the people around me especially the colleagues... they are not concerned about my feelings. I think no point telling them, people in general like to gossip especially if the news is juicy. So once you talked about it then words would spread and you won’t have a peace of mind.”

Eileen continued to work in the same industry as her ex-husband; and she commented that her workplace was also rife with gossip. She expressed concern about having to react to colleagues’ queries and incessant comments and gossips.

**Theme 5b.4: Being Blamed for the Divorce (-)**

Two participants (1 & 13) said their families blamed them for the breakdown of their marriage. Anna was accused of driving her husband away with her difficult personality. Mahesh, who already felt terrible about the outcome of the marriage, felt even more miserable and inferior when family, relatives and friends became judgemental and critical of him. Another two participants (4 & 11) also believed that family, friends and colleagues thought of them negatively. Dalina believed that her husband’s relatives blamed her for initiating the divorce and refusing to accept the second wife that he had married in Batam, as he was allowed to have up to four wives at a time under Muslim law. Katherine felt that while her colleagues and employer admired her success in her work and career, they looked down on her for the failure of her marriage.
Katherine, Participant Number 11 (Woman, Aged 51)

“I felt that people thought there was something wrong with me. They wondered how come I ended up like that and it must be my fault. You are very successful with a career, but your personal life is all a mess. So they make me feel like a failure.”

Theme 5b.5: Having to Cope As a Single Parent (-)

The responsibility of being a single parent had a negative effect on four female participants (1, 4, 6 & 11). Felicia felt so sorry for her son because he had to “lose his father when he was not even responsible for the bad marriage.” Katherine, who rated herself as “Very Well-Adjusted” during the interview, said she was initially beset by fear and was worried about having to raise her children on her own and making all the decisions herself. Anna was concerned about raising two young boys without a “fatherly figure in their formative years”. Dalina, who considered herself “Still Trying to Adjust”, also did not think she could manage on her own because her youngest child was only a year old and the second in kindergarten when she divorced. Her anxiety at not having a husband and being a single parent was so overwhelming that she became suspicious, fearful and uncertain even though the divorce had occurred nine years ago.

Theme 5b.6: Lack of Family Support (-)

The absence of family support also impeded adjustment. Nancy and Dalina lamented that their families were not sensitive to their feelings, and that they did not communicate understanding and empathy for their sadness and grief. Dalina’s parents were clueless about her feelings, while Nancy’s conservative family was more concerned about the “loss of face” rather than for her sufferings following the divorce. To her father, it was an aberration of sorts to his perfect Oriental family. Although they did not berate her, they did not accept the divorce either; and the absence of any word of encouragement or support was just as hurting.
Nancy, Participant Number 14 (Women, Aged 48)

“The day I filed actually I felt very miserable over it. I tried so hard to cope with it. There were a lot of things I could do on my own. The kids were so young and I had to bring up the kids. I had to work doubly hard. My parents were like not able to understand and they kept pushing me for an understanding. They keep asking: why, why. My family hardly supported me and I did everything myself.”

Theme 5b.7: Being Harassed by Unknown Callers (-)

For Katherine, it was the obscene phone calls that she and her children received after she had filed for divorce that affected her adjustment. The participant, who considered herself “Most Well-Adjusted” at the time of the interview, described the nature of these calls.

Katherine, Participant Number 11 (Woman, Aged 51)

“I get a lot of weird calls in the middle of the night. And these calls were very obscene. No voice but just very obscene heavy breathing. “I’ve got no clue what it was. And it was like that for many months even after we went to court, it would continue. My children were badly affected for a year. I suspect they were related to the divorce although I couldn’t validate.”

Theme 5b.8: Lack of Financial Security (-)

A lack of financial security took a toll on Rajiv’s adjustment. He used to share household expenses with his wife; however, she stopped contributing financially immediately after she filed for divorce. As a pastor, his income was dependent on speaking engagements, but his financial state deteriorated when some churches suddenly stopped inviting him to speak after they found out about his divorce. He narrated that the lack of financial stability affected his adjustment even though emotionally he had healed.

Rajiv, Participant Number 18 (Man, Aged 38)

“And certain churches were not inviting me any more when they came to know about the divorce. So that really threw me off guard because here we are, preaching love, restoration and forgiveness. ... So maybe emotionally, it’s a scale to 9. But for finances, I think would be about 4 to 6.”
Summary on Divorce Outcomes and Adjustment Indicators and Factors

In concert with other research done on divorce and the negative outcomes of divorce, this research identified eight main negative themes and eight negative sub-themes related to post-divorce outcomes. These negative outcomes were mainly experiences of negative feelings and almost all women reported such negative experiences especially feelings of loneliness and guilt. They also shared that family life was adversely affected because they were afraid of social disapproval and family’s reaction to the divorce. Indeed, one of the participants in this study, Nancy, asserted that nothing good could come out of a broken marriage as whatever followed from a divorce were essentially reactions and negative adjustments.

In addition to the discussion of negative factors, this research also examined how participants were able to adjust and grow through the divorce experience and emerge sufficiently strong to appreciate the eventual positive outcomes that could follow a divorce. Among the 19 participants in this study, two-thirds (13) reported that they are “Very Well-Adjusted”; and collectively, their narratives yielded seven positive themes and eight sub-themes on outcomes that followed almost immediately after filing for divorce. For instance, they reported that they were “relieved” that with the divorce, the problems in their marriage ended. Anna no longer had to put up with the harassment of her husband’s debtors coming to her home at night, while Eileen no longer had to juggle her irregular work schedule with the responsibility of looking after her ex-husband’s sickly mother and his son from his previous marriage.

Often, positive outcomes were only realised after some lapse of time. Susan and Queenie, who suffered from clinical depression and nervous breakdowns respectively during their marriage, recovered completely some time after their divorce. Some negative outcomes even turned into positive ones following the participants’ continuing adjustment.
over time. Initially, nearly all the participants, except for Jenny and Betty, reported various negative, ambiguous and uncertain feelings upon filing for divorce. However, these negative feelings dissipated and were replaced by positive ones over time. Anna, who said she had cried pitifully and regularly after her divorce, became more positive and strong eventually.

Other examples of positive outcomes came from seven participants who were able to develop a healthier relationship with their ex-spouse. They all reinforced the importance of improving communication with their ex-spouses without acrimony and rancour after their divorce, and even went on to have friendly and cordial relationships with them. In Helen’s case, she was even able to develop better communication with her ex-husband despite being unable to talk to him without arguing during their marriage. Divorce has also given five divorcees (2, 8, 11, 12 & 17) an increased awareness that they are stronger and more resourceful. The participants provided many examples of the importance of emotional and practical support as well as participating in meaningful activities post-divorce. Developing a new personal philosophy of life helped Gopal to come to terms with his divorce, while finding deeper spiritual meaning to life contributed to Rajiv’s post-divorce growth. Susan was also able to come to terms with her divorce and to learn from the divorce experience by taking joint responsibility for the marriage dissolution. Six women and one man reflected on the importance of having the personal strength to make a fresh start by finding a clear sense of identity, developing self-growth, starting a new chapter in life and returning to a more confident, self-reliant and self-assured state with a better understanding of the factors that could strengthen or weaken a marriage.
Part F: Salvaging Marriages

Section 6: Saving Troubled Marriages

This section addresses the fifth research question: Are there any interventions and strategies that divorcees could use to salvage troubled marriage? At the time of the interview, many of the 19 participants had already attained some degree of psychological adjustment to divorce. By then the intensity of the conflict was less distressing than prior to the dissolution of the marriage. Hence, this was the most difficult aspect of the interview for most of them, when they were invited to reflect upon their personal experiences and to offer comments and suggestions on whether their marriages could have been salvaged. The interview required them to re-examine the reasons they had given for their marriage ending and whether on hindsight they could have explored the marital issues differently and decided on some other pathways that might have averted the need for divorce.

By the time the interview was carried out, the researcher had already established rapport with the participants and almost all of them (except for the two who were mentioned in Part A of this chapter) were relaxed and able to respond freely to the question: “On looking back, do you think there was anything you could have done to save your marriage?” With gentle probing by the researcher, the majority of the participants were able to consider this question with objectivity, and even nine (47%) of the participants who had initially said their marriages could not be saved were able to give thoughts to the question and offer suggestions. The participants’ responses are captured under four main themes: marriages that could not be saved; effort by self; effort by both parties; and tapping on external resources (see Table 5.22).

Although individual effort is important in saving a troubled marriage, marriage is a partnership and the other party’s contribution or lack thereof can make or break the relationship. Hence, it is not surprising that of the 16 sub-themes identified for salvaging a
marriage, 12 of them called for effort by both parties. The four main themes and 25 sub-themes on saving troubled marriages are listed in Table 5.22.

**Table 5.22**

**Section 6: Saving Troubled Marriages**

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Theme 6.1: Marriages That Could Not Be Saved

Eleven participants, eight women and three men (1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 13, 14, 17, 18 & 19), said initially that their marriages could not be saved. The main reasons cited were that their spouses had no interest in saving the marriage and that they did not respond positively to efforts at reconciliation. Even though these responses reflected only the perspectives of the participants, and not their spouses, they highlighted the fact that when a marriage is in danger, it takes both parties to avert the final break-up. The researcher would like to emphasise that the views presented here are the participants’ and do not reflect any judgment on her part as to whether these marriages could or could not have been saved.

Altogether, six sub-themes were identified: spouse’s indifference to saving the marriage; spouse’s refusal to change unacceptable behaviour; a lack of effort by spouse; an absence of love and concern; spouse’s mental illness; and tolerance of spouse’s behaviour could not save the marriage.

Sub-theme 6.1.1: Spouse’s Indifference towards Saving the Marriage

Spousal indifference to save the marriage was the common sub-theme identified by three male and three female participants. These participants shared that they had tried talking to their spouses to resolve their marital issues, but that they were indifferent to salvaging the marriage. According to Anna, she made persistent efforts to reconcile with her husband, but to no avail.

Anna, Participant Number 1 (Woman, Aged 41)

“Come to the worst the last two years before the divorce, especially when we try to make up. Somehow it just didn’t work and when the crisis happened to me, he totally ignored me and that was when I came to a decision that I should leave him.”

In Nancy’s case, she felt she had done all that she could to save her marriage by trying to talk it out, showing willingness to work at the marriage and giving her husband numerous chances to change, but he was not interested in ending his extramarital affairs.
Instead, he stopped taking care of the family, and abandoned his daily routine of taking the children to school. She described in the interview, the non-committal response of her husband when she asked for a chance to salvage their marriage.

**Nancy, Participant Number 14 (Woman, Aged 48)**

‘I asked him out for a meal together with the children and I asked him: ‘Do you want to salvage the marriage?’ He didn’t answer me. So I said the answer is no, then so you do want a divorce?”

Since he did not stop the divorce from taking place, Nancy concluded that he was no longer interested in the marriage.

Felicia said her husband made the choice to leave their matrimonial home following the short conversation she had with him. She believed that there was no attempt made by her husband to salvage the marriage as he not only was very prompt in accepting the suggestion of divorce when she raised marital issues with him but also continued to make no attempt at reconciliation. Felicia felt that even at the late stage of waiting for the divorce to be finalised, the marriage could still have been saved if only her husband had shown interest in doing so.

**Felicia, Participant Number 6 (Woman, Aged 49)**

‘I just popped the question, Are you wanting a divorce? He said ‘ok, fine, if that’s what you want!’ Even after I clarified that I have no intention to get a divorce and I want to salvage our relationship, for the sake of our son but, two days later, he moved out and I filed for divorce... Even during those six months (after filing for divorce), I was still hoping that he may turn back, I was prepared to forgive but he was no longer interested in the marriage.”

Rajiv said he had not only made an effort to change himself but also asked others for help in speaking to his ex-wife. They went for counselling and he approached close family friends to mediate, but to no avail. In the end, although his wife continued to keep in contact with him after she filed for divorce he said she chose to start another relationship instead of working at saving their marriage.
In Mahesh’s case, his wife totally refused to communicate with him despite his trying all ways to win her back.

Gopal’s wife chose not to change her ways even though he spoke repeatedly to her about their problems, and when he filed for divorce, she did not make an effort at reconciliation. He described how, in the end, she could not be bothered with him anymore.

**Gopal, Participant Number 7 (Man, Aged 42)**

“And when she knew that I was serious about it, she locked me out of the master bedroom, make me sleep on the floor. She can’t be bothered with me. Then, we were sleeping apart. We didn’t talk even though we were in the same house.”

**Sub-theme 6.1.2: Spouse’s Refusal to Change Unacceptable Behaviour**

Gopal also described the numerous occasions that he would communicate with his wife on marital problems related to her “vulgarity” and “hysteria” and he described how his wife would cry but not make any effort to change.

**Gopal, Participant Number 7 (Man, Aged 42)**

“Three occasions we talk about divorce, she started crying. I said I forgive you. Let’s start again. Please try to change. After the third occasion, she still doesn’t change and one month later, come back to the same thing.”

In Queenie’s case, she believed her husband would not change to save their marriage because he did not listen to her repeated appeals not to have sex with her while she was sick. She eventually left home to escape his sexual harassment.

**Queenie, Participant Number 17 (Woman, Aged 57)**

“I have given him many chances. I told him not to have sex with me when I am sick. Each time, he would say sorry and he would force sex on me again.”

Penny’s and Katherine’s husbands had multiple affairs during their marriage and they would not change their behaviour to save their marriages. Penny said her husband could not change as he did not have self-control, and although Katherine’s husband begged for forgiveness after his first episode of infidelity, he went on to commit another. She described what happened.
Katherine, Participant Number 11 (Woman, Aged 51)

“Two years after the discovery of his infidelity, he started to change again and increasingly he was hardly at home. He became an absent father. And I think that sort of got me suspicious and my private investigator confirmed that he was having another affair. That was for me a very clear signal that he does not want this marriage.”

**Sub-theme: 6.1.3: Lack of Effort by Spouse**

Eileen, who had problems living with her mother-in-law’s intrusions into their privacy at night, said her husband refused to do anything even though he was frustrated by the same problems.

**Eileen, Participant Number 5 (Woman, Aged 35)**

“I told him we have to do something about your mother. It’s either you tell your mother or I leave. Being a nice guy he will never tell his mother off, so I left.”

**Sub-theme 6.1.4: Absence of Love and Concern from Spouse**

Another factor identified by two female participants (1 & 11) that contributed to an inability to salvage a marriage is the loss of spousal love and concern. Katherine’s husband did not care if she were to commit suicide or if she went missing. She said her husband showed undisguised indifference when she hinted she might kill herself. In Anna’s case, her husband told her directly he no longer loved her when she made a last-ditch attempt to save their marriage.

**Anna, Participant Number 1 (Woman, Aged 41)**

“I actually called him out the night before going to the court and begged him to re-unite again. He actually said something that drained me really down. He said: ‘Anna, I really don’t have any more feelings for you and no longer love you. Drop the ideas.’ I was totally shattered.”

**Sub-theme 6.1.5: Spouse’s Mental Illness**

Susan had supported her husband through his bipolar condition for 10 years, putting up with his uncontrollable abusive behaviour which she believed stemmed from his mental condition. Eventually, she decided to give up her marriage.
Susan, Participant Number 19 (Woman, Aged 44)

“Personally, I don’t think my marriage could have been salvaged. I did everything I could have… When I found out he had a bipolar mental condition, I paid for his medical bills for a long time as he was not working. When he wanted to go on holidays, I would pay for it. I encouraged him to get hobbies. Taking a step back and asking yourself... is it worth saving the marriage? As much as we say we want to save the marriage, some marriages just cannot be saved.”

Sub-theme 6.1.6: Tolerance of Spouse’s Behaviour Could not Save the Marriage

In counselling situations, clients are often advised to exercise greater tolerance in dealing with marital problems. Three female participants (4, 5 &11) in their interviews said they had tried to save their marriage by tolerating the problems they had with their spouses. Penny said that for a long time she gave in instead of fighting with her husband over his affairs, while Katherine chose to forgive her husband for his infidelity. She explained why she did so.

Katherine, Participant Number 11, (Woman, Aged 51)

“Well, he begged for forgiveness and apologized. So I sort of forgave him and I carried on because as a Christian I want to keep the family together so I sort of said okay let’s start all over again. But he had another affair.”

Dalina put up with her husband’s repeated infidelity with different women over a period of years because she thought the affairs could not be serious, but eventually when her husband took a second wife under Islamic law, she could no longer tolerate the situation and decided to divorce him. Eileen, who was unhappy living with her mother-in-law, tolerated the situation for years, hoping that her husband would change, but to no avail.

Eileen, Participant Number 5 (Woman, Aged 35)

“Actually I have always giving myself a chance as much as I want to stay married which is why I tolerated for so many years looking for a change hope that my husband will come back to me.”

Tolerance may be necessary in a marriage but clearly it is insufficient on its own to save it. In the cases mentioned above, the marriages failed because according to the
participants, their spouses continued to behave in ways that threatened the stability of the marriage.

**Theme 6.2: Effort by Self**

Four sub-themes were identified under the category, self-effort: being more committed to the marriage; being tolerant and forgiving of adultery; clarifying reasons for marriage; and marrying a partner of the same religion. Participants felt these efforts would have been within their power to exercise.

**Sub-theme 6.2.1: Being More Committed to Saving the Marriage**

Three female participants (1, 2 & 3) suggested that making a stronger commitment to staying in their marriage could be a way to salvage it. For Anna, this meant not seeking legal action so quickly. She believed that once she engaged a lawyer there was little chance to save her marriage. She described how she was indirectly pushed to file her divorce even though she was dithering over whether she actually wanted to proceed with it. She said she was confused during that traumatic period and went along willy-nilly signing all those papers with little awareness of the consequences. Betty stated she could have made a stronger commitment to her marriage by choosing to love and support her husband more and, perhaps, by even sacrificing her career and agreeing to re-locate with him when he was posted overseas.

**Betty, Participant Number 2 (Woman, Aged 32)**

“I just realized when I was talking to you that if you really love your husband and you want to stay with him, you actually can save a marriage. You will try to please him and be charming. Perhaps, I should have quitted my work and relocate with him. And, that would have been a sacrifice for me too because I was doing well at work and I was having a great time and building seniority. So the issue is am I willing?”

For Chitra, salvaging her marriage was a matter of committing to supporting her ex-husband’s mental illness. If she were to do it all over again, she said she would find out
more about managing his mental illness and seeking professional help instead of avoiding him for ten years. The researcher noted that the issue of making a greater commitment to marriage was one that only the women raised. Generally, it could be because the women in this group were the initiators of the divorce even though two of the men were the ones who initiated divorce.

**Sub-theme 6.2.2: Being Tolerant and Forgiving of Adultery**

Three women and one man (2, 4, 15 & 16) believed that tolerating or even forgiving their spouse’s infidelity could have saved their marriages. Penny confessed that while she had tolerated her husband, she could have tried to understand him more and looked at the problems from both sides, evaluating the situation and proposing solutions to resolve the problem of his infidelity. Oscar, on the other hand, insisted that his wife should have just accepted his affairs.

**Oscar, Participant Number 15 (Man, Aged 65) (4 wives)**

“If you love your husband, a wife should not create so much trouble. Just act as a good wife, and then don’t interfere with his affairs with another lady. So if this man can realize that, to have you is more important than the other affair, and he will come back. And that is exactly how I fail in my own marriage too.”

Oscar added that more marriages these days break down because of the changing gender roles in society. Modern women, unlike during his father’s and grandfather’s time, were less obedient to their husband and more intolerant of his adultery. Perhaps, Oscar, in his 60’s and Penny, in her 70s, represent the marital values of their time, and this might not necessarily find resonance among the younger generation. Betty, for example, who was in her 30s, said she could have forgiven her ex-husband’s infidelity if she had come from a more conservative background and if she held the same values as the older generation. However, she added that she would need to love her husband a lot more to forgive him in her situation as the trust was lost when the reality of the relationship dawned upon her. Similarly, Nancy felt that tolerating her husband’s adultery was not feasible as it was not a
long-term solution and it might impact negatively on the children, who were aware that their father was seeing other women.

Dalina, however, advised other women to forgive their husbands’ infidelity because it was not easy to be a single woman, especially as a single parent. She said that on hindsight, remaining in the marriage would have been preferable as long as she was able to support herself and that the relationship was not too abusive. She advocated resignation and acceptance and relied on hope that the husband would change his wayward behaviour. Dalina, who of all the participants had perhaps made the least adjustment in her divorce because she was still emotionally and psychologically attached to her ex-husband, had actually also suffered physical and verbal abuse by him. He not only had a history of infidelity but had also taken a second wife under Muslim law. In a sense, Dalina’s views paralleled Oscar’s conservative and traditional assertions that women should make the effort to overlook their husbands’ adultery at whatever cost to themselves. It is interesting to note that none of the men expressed any view that they should be tolerant of their wives’ infidelity; and even though Latif’s wife had committed adultery, he did not raise the matter in the interview.

Sub-theme 6.2.3: Clarifying Reasons for Marriage

Jenny suggested that one had to be clear about the reason for getting together before marrying. She believed that one of the reasons why her marriage did not work out was because both she and her ex-husband did not go into the marriage for the right reasons, adding that she had chosen to marry him as a way of escaping from her parents’ home. Iris shared that she was quite clueless why she had got married in the first place.

Sub-theme 6.2.4: Marrying a Partner of the Same Religion

Through the failure of his marriage, Latif came to believe that it was absolutely necessary to choose a marriage partner of the same faith. His wife was a Christian and
although she did embrace Islam initially she was not able to hold on to her new religion and eventually the marriage broke because she gave up on Islam. Upon reflection, Latif felt that it was critical to convert for the right reason. He explained how he would approach future partners differently.

**Latif, Participant Number 12 (Man, Aged 34)**

“I think, based on my experience, I would have to lay down my cards from the beginning and say that I would stick to my religion. I need to marry someone who is also a Muslim. If you want to marry you have to convert; you have to know the religion. I don’t want you to marry me just because of love. A wife must convert for the faith and not because she wants to marry you.”

**Theme 6.3: Effort by Both Parties**

Most of the participants emphasized that effort by both parties is crucial to salvage the marriage as any true reconciliation requires the participation of the husband and wife. Twelve sub-themes are categorised under the theme, Effort by Both Parties, and they are, improving two-way communication; working jointly on problems; managing disparities in career achievement; building up mutual understanding; spending time together; remembering good times together; affirming love, respect and trust to each other; giving personal space; giving priority to privacy as a couple; having children; bonding with extended family; and being mentally prepared for the marriage.

**Sub-theme 6.3.1: Improving Two-way Communication**

Eight participants, six women and two men (1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 & 13), reported that engagement in open communication with their spouse about marital problems could have saved their marriage. While most of them seemed to have taken the onus upon themselves to improve communication channels with their spouses, some of their remarks were applicable to two-way communication; hence, it has been included under the theme, Effort by Both Parties. Iris lamented she should have communicated more with her ex-husband.
instead of taking the easy way out via annulment. She added it was critical that problems in marriage be addressed squarely and early and not swept under the carpet.

**Iris, Participant Number 9 (Woman, Aged 30)**

“I could have talked about it more. Commit to the fact that we will try to make it work and that could be the first step. We should try to seek out early conversation and not wait until like us, three to four feel like digging it out anymore.” years later when it’s already so bad. You know the problem is being buried so deep, it’s grounded; we just don’t

For communication to be effective, the participants mentioned that several conditions have to be met. One of them must be the absence of interference from third parties. Gopal regretted that he was prevented from resolving issues with his wife because of interference from his wife’s family, especially his sisters-in-law who were adversely against him and his marriage. In Felicia’s case, she believed that things might have turned out differently, and that she could have averted her ex-husband’s infidelity if she had initiated a dialogue with him and clarified that she was unhappy with his constantly blaming her.

Helen and Jenny both said that for communication to be effective and useful, it must be continuous and not done in fits and starts; adding that there had to be genuine commitment and the right attitude to address the marriage issues constructively.

While most participants under this sub-theme felt that efforts to improve communication with their spouses might have helped save their marriages, one participant felt she should also have made an attempt to communicate with her in-laws to help resolve the situation. Chitra, who had run away after finding out about her husband’s mental illness, lamented that she did not attempt to understand and educate herself about his predicament. She thought that if she had openly discussed this with her husband’s family and explored workable options, the marriage might have been saved.
**Sub-theme 6.3.2: Working Jointly on Problems**

Other than communicating, a couple also needs to work together on the problems in their marriage in order to save it. Seven participants, four women and three men (6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 17 & 19), highlighted the need to get both parties involved in the process for the efforts to be effective. Since his remarriage, Mahesh has learned to work out problems more effectively with his second wife. While recognising that there was no perfect marriage, he was certain that if a couple worked on it with openness every day, even a problematic marriage could be saved. Mahesh explained why he believed this to be the case.

**Mahesh, Participant Number 13 (Man, Aged 53)**

“Because marriage is about two different people coming together... In a marriage I believe that both parties have to take responsibility for any problems in a marriage.”

Unfortunately, all the seven participants said they were not able to salvage their marriage as they did not get the cooperation of their spouse. On reflection, Queenie realised that her efforts to save her marriage did not work because she was too submissive and reticent, and so did not engage her husband in the dialogue. In Felicia’s case, her ex-husband did not reciprocate after she made the first move to reconcile. She believed that if her husband had the motivation to save the marriage, the marital issues could have been resolved.

**Felicia, Participant Number 6 (Woman, Aged 49)**

“The first step and move has to be made by him because he was the one who walked out of the house...I already made the first move to try to salvage the marriage by initiating a chat and if he had agreed to discuss the issue things might be different.”

**Sub-theme 6.3.3: Managing Disparities in Career Achievement**

Two female participants (11 & 17) suggested the need to be more sensitive to their husbands’ feelings concerning the success in their careers. Katherine, who was better educated than her husband, had moved further up the career ladder. As a result, he felt
envious and inadequate, which eventually led to their divorce. Asian men are particularly sensitive to such gender stereotypes, and it would have to be managed and resolved or it would continually re-surface in the marriage, as experienced by Katherine.

**Katherine, Participant Number 11 (Woman, Aged 51)**

“Career advancement and educational success really need to be worked out. Even if he understood I felt it was not enough. Because looking back at the 15 years marriage, one of the things that keep on surfacing was the difference in our education and career.”

Queenie, whose marriage had also run into problems because of the disparity in their educational levels and achievements, felt that on hindsight she should have encouraged him to upgrade himself.

**Sub-theme 6.3.4: Building up Mutual Understanding**

One female and two male participants (1, 7 & 18) suggested that being more understanding of each other could have helped save their marriage as well. Anna regretted not making more effort to understand her ex-husband’s career failure, inferiority complex and health problems. She said this could have helped her deal with the conflicts they had.

Rajiv, who counselled couples at his church, believed that recognising that each individual was different and accepting each other as such would help foster better communication and improve relationships. For Gopal, mutual understanding was needed in a marriage, especially in a situation where both spouses were holding full-time jobs, and the work pressures exacted on each spouse was great.

**Gopal, Participant Number 7 (Man, Aged 42)**

“I think divorce arise because of all the pressure we have... If one party is experiencing pressure and you come home and you want someone to listen and guide you, give advice to you and let off pressure. But imagine if both parties are pressurized from work, both come back to release pressure, and no one to support.”
**Sub-theme 6.3.5: Spending Time Together**

Spending time together was suggested by two female participants (8 & 17) as a way to salvage their marriage. Both Helen and Queenie believed that spending time together and doing things together would have helped their marriage, or at least reduced the opportunity for spouses to go astray.

**Queenie, Participant Number 17 (Woman, Aged 57)**

“If I still love him, then I should spend more time with him. Because when a man has an affair, there’s always a reason. This friend of mine loves to play mah-jong. Her husband is very handsome and a good talker. I know him. So it’s very easy to stray, like he had an affair with his maid.”

**Sub-theme 6.3.6: Remembering Good Times Together**

Nancy believed that if both of them had treasured and appreciated the wonderful times they had spent together instead of focusing only on the negative and painful events, it might have helped their marriage.

**Nancy, Participant Number 14 (Woman, Aged 48)**

“I always feel that when a couple wants to be divorced they should actually think about the sweet and romantic times they had together. These are all the positive things in life that they have to think about before they get divorced.”

Unfortunately, her husband did not subscribe to the same view. On how he reacted to her suggestion, she volunteered:

“I told him about all these good moments but it did not work and he did not answer or respond.”

**Sub-theme 6.3.7: Showing Love, Respect and Trust to Each Other**

Katherine felt she could have stayed in the marriage if there had been an expression of compassionate love by her husband. If only he had persuaded her not to kill herself, she said she would not have filed for divorce. The lack of spousal love and care was especially hurtful for her.
Katherine, Participant Number 11 (Woman, Aged 51)

“I did ask him, “What if I also want to commit suicide (like his mistress)? Would you come back?” And he looked at me and he said, “I know you won’t”. I think if he indicated that he valued our relationship, I would have stayed.”

In Mahesh’s case, he felt one of the ways he could have saved his marriage was by trusting his wife and managing his explosive temper. He narrated how he got very hurt and upset when his wife’s previous boyfriend visited her in hospital.

Mahesh, Participant Number 13 (Man, Aged 53)

“I could have just taken the friend’s visit as an old acquaintance who was just visiting her. Since she is already married to me I should give her the trust and not jumped to conclusions that she had gone for an abortion and harboured negative thoughts.”

The importance of having respect in a marriage was also mentioned by three female participants (1, 16 & 19). It is obvious, as recounted by Anna, Susan and Penny, that a little respect and consideration could have gone a long way to save their marriage.

Unfortunately, all three husbands, according to the participants’ accounts, were intensely chauvinistic, and to establish their male dominance, they required their wives to be submissive and obedient. Both Susan and Penny lamented that if only their spouse had shown a little respect for them, they would have relented.

Sub-theme 6.3.8: Giving Personal Space

The need for personal space in the relationship was described as very crucial in a marriage.

Jenny, Participant Number 10 (Woman, Aged 40)

“We were in an unintentional co-dependent situation. He didn’t have friends. So his world was just me and his business. We should on hindsight have our own lives too e.g. hobbies and own circle of friends. Every time people are looking for the other half. So I don’t agree with that. You should not be dependent on each other to be complete. You need to be two circles, instead of two halves together.”
Sub-theme 6.3.9: Giving Priority to Privacy as a Couple

Eileen said that a marriage could survive only if the couple enjoyed being intimate and yet recognised the need for emotional and psychological space. She felt that her marriage was deeply enmeshed, with her mother-in-law intruding frequently the privacy of her bedroom. There was no privacy, much less individual space, and she was bitter that her husband did not manage the intrusions better, resulting in the eventual loss of intimacy with his moving to sleep in a separate room. In response to the question if there was an option to save the marriage, she insisted that the only way to save the marriage was to move her mother-in-law out of the house.

Sub-theme 6.3.10 Having Children

Gopal believed that having a child could cement a marriage. He explained how this could help.

Gopal, Participant Number 7 (Man, Aged 42)

“A family is not a family without a child. Being married for so many years is like girlfriend-boyfriend. It’s not like husband and wife relationship. I used to get so tired of her nagging; I just go out and get drunk. So that will numb the pain. But whenever my god-daughter comes over, the atmosphere in the house is different. It’s a happy home.”

Sub-theme 6.3.11: Bonding with Extended Family

Queenie believed spending time with the extended family was one way a marriage could be strengthened, adding that the bond and closeness of the family would come in useful during a marriage crisis.

Queenie, Participant Number 17 (Woman, Aged 57)

“To create a strong bond within the family, this closeness shared in the entire extended family, including your children, your siblings, gather together often.”

Sub-theme 6.3.12: Being Mentally Prepared for the Marriage

Too often couples focused their preparations for a life together on that one day – the wedding day - and unfortunately, overlooked the very reason for their union: living
together as a married couple. Three participants, two women and one man, (9, 10 & 12) suggested that to get the foundation of the marriage right, the couple had to be mentally, emotionally and even physically prepared for the marriage and not for the wedding day only. For Iris, this meant discussing and agreeing on the important issues in marriage way before the solemnization. She enumerated the issues a couple should attempt to address before marriage, including issues on children, finances, sex and housing arrangements.

**Iris, Participant Number 9 (Woman, Aged 30)**

“There’s a lot it takes to be mentally prepared. They should discuss issues like how often to have sex; how they want to bring up their children; how many children; they want to have, who they are going to live with. You must not assume that just because you are committed to a purchase of a flat, you should get married.”

Latif and Jenny viewed mental preparation before marriage as critical, as their spouses had to make fundamental adaptations when they began their new life together. Both ended their marriage because they could not agree with their spouse on the basic issues affecting their life together. Latif had discussed conversion to Islam with his Christian wife before marriage. However, he said his marriage failed because, although she tried, she was not fully prepared for the change. Jenny’s case differed in that she had not discussed the issue of which country to live in with her Japanese husband before marriage. Perhaps she had assumed he had no objection residing in Singapore because that was where he was living when they met. However, he was unhappy and very critical of the country. Jenny believed her ex-husband could not accept living in Singapore because he was not mentally prepared to do so. She felt that flexibility and willingness to adapt by both parties could have salvaged her marriage.

**Theme 6.4: Tapping on External Resources**

The possibilities of getting several external sources of assistance was suggested by 12 participants, eight women and four men, (3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 18 & 19) as
helpful in salvaging their marriage. These interventions could come from family, friends, church, mediators and mental health professionals and marriage counsellors. However, Oscar held opposing view that external resources should not get involve with family issues.

Sub-theme 6.4.1: Mediation by Relatives

Some participants (3, 7, &13) felt that mediation from relatives could be helpful. Mahesh felt he should have done more to win over his in-laws. He said that according to Indian culture, he should have humbled himself, apologised to his in-laws and invited them to help resolve their marital issues. Chitra, too, suggested that external third party mediation involving both families could also save marriages. However, Oscar held strong opposing views and he did not believe that involvement of families and in-laws would have been beneficial in saving any marriages.

Chitra, Participant Number 3 (Woman, Aged 44)

“If both families could sit down and if somebody mediated the situation and brought both families together and find out what exactly this young couple is missing, and what help they need them to dialogue and be open about it.”

Perhaps the issue of multi-cultural intervention unique to each race and religion could also be a factor in the success of the mediation process. What these two cases had in common was that the participants were both from a conservative Indian background.

In contrast, two participants believed that the involvement of parents might not be helpful, even though one of them was an Indian but married to a Chinese. Gopal, whose wife’s family did not accept him, said his in-laws were actually the root cause of their conflict.

Sub-theme 6.4.2: Mediation by Friends

Felicia was also against family intervention as she felt they would tend to take sides. She, however, suggested that a family friend who was a professional counsellor known to both sides and who was also unbiased, neutral and objective should play the
mediator’s role. Mahesh, whose wife had refused to talk to him after she left the matrimonial home, said he should have approached his friends to help mediate instead of going straight to file for divorce.

**Sub-theme 6.4.3: Professional Marriage Counselling**

Nine of the participants (5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 18 &19) felt that they should have gone for marriage counselling to resolve their marital issues. Jenny, Iris and Helen advocated this proactive step to save their marriage and they believed that the marriage counsellors could have sorted out the differences and re-aligned the communication so that the parties could relate to each other again.

Rajiv believed counselling was not only necessary when a marriage was in trouble but also as part of the process needed to maintain a good marriage. He suggested annual marriage retreats with a holistic counselling approach to help keep a marriage intact. Further, he cautioned that couples must be honest and bring matters up to the counsellors immediately and not allow problems to deteriorate into crises before bringing them up. Helen agreed that interventions had to be early for it to be effective, adding that if the underlying problems were left to fester, the couple would find it too onerous or tiring to resolve them.

Despite the view that counselling could help salvage their marriage, three of the participants insisted that the counselling should be mutually agreed upon as an intervention to save the marriage. Susan and Eileen, however, voiced their scepticism. The caveat, according to Eileen, was that the parties must not blame each other but be willing to listen and change. Iris believed people did not turn to counselling because of the attached stigma within their local community. She described the negative reaction people might have when they discovered that someone had gone for counselling.
Iris, Participant Number 9 (Woman, Aged 30)

“The whole counselling idea seems so obscured. You don’t hear people in Asia openly talking about getting counselling. People seem to still have the perception of why do you need counselling? What’s wrong with you? The whole impression of counselling seems so foreign in a way. However, I did go for counselling but it was just talking.”

Gopal and Katherine believed that attending counselling might have helped their marriage but their spouses thought differently and therefore did not agree or work out the issues professionally with the counsellors. Gopal thought that if he and his wife had sought help, it might have salvaged the marriage. Katherine’s husband, however, did not want to go for counselling in spite of her efforts initiating it.

Katherine, Participant Number 11 (Woman, Aged 51) said:

“I strongly believe that the marriage can be saved. However, what was unfortunate is that I think a marriage needs two to tango, it needs two people to work it out. We had sort of counselling and every time when there is a session with the counsellor I’m the only one who turned up. So despite even going down to his office to corner him but he told them, ‘Don’t waste your time. I am not going to see the counsellor’.”

On the other hand, two marriages failed despite the couples attending marriage counselling. In Latif’s case, his ex-wife attended counselling but stopped after one session. According to Latif, she had found it unhelpful although he thought it could have been just an excuse for not wanting to save the marriage. Susan was the only participant who managed to get her husband to attend marriage counselling continuously with her. However, it did not work out because he was more interested in assigning blame than working out their problems together. She described how he would be self-righteous and twisted the counsellor’s advice to justify his actions during the counselling sessions. It was a frustrating process for her.
Summary on Salvaging a Marriage

The suggestions and comments made by the participants seemed to suggest that some marriages had absolutely no foundation or support for continuing and it was probably best for all concerned to dissolve them. They appeared to suggest that when mutual love, care, trust and respect and especially, the mutual will to save the marriage were lacking, the couple had nothing to build on in order to repair the relationship. Continuing in these marriages would ultimately be damaging to both spouses and their children.

More than half the participants felt, however, that there was a possibility of repairing a marriage provided both parties were willing to communicate and take joint responsibility to resolve marital issues. On the other hand, participants mentioned that feeble, non-committed or one-sided attempts to mend the relationship would fail because of a lack of motivation, as would impatience and the desire for an instant solution. Anna, Felicia, Jenny and Katherine as well as Latif all believed that there was no instant solution, and to effectively bond again would require trust, respect and forgiveness. While more than half the participants thought that external intervention might be helpful, choosing the right person or persons would be crucial to the success of the process. Overall, participants felt that salvaging a marriage would take an enormous amount of effort, and failure was almost inevitable if both parties did not put in their share of individual and joint effort to save the marriage.

This chapter has described the positive and negative post-divorce experiences of the 19 divorcees. It also addressed the issue of whether there were any interventions that could have been taken to salvage troubled marriages. The next chapter, Chapter 6, discusses the counsellors’ perspectives of their clients’ post-divorce experiences and their viewpoints on how marriages could be saved by divorcees.
CHAPTER 6
STUDY 3
QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS WITH COUNSELLORS

This chapter is based on a parallel set of semi-structured interviews with 12 counsellors on how their clients constructed meaning and understanding in relation to the specific reasons for their divorce, as well as the positive and negative impact these clients encountered post-divorce. The counsellors in Study 3 were considered by the local counselling community to be experts in their field based on their experience and qualifications. These counsellors were not the same as those who helped identify suitable participants for the semi-structured interviews in Study 2. Similarly, the counsellors’ clients were divorcees who formed a completely different batch from the 19 divorcees who participated in the semi-structured interviews discussed in Study 2.

Study 3 analysed the counsellors’ narration of their clients’ adjustment, and their views on how marriages could be salvaged. The researcher saw the interviews with the counsellors as a natural extension of Study 2 as it provided both contrasts and similarities between the views of the professional counsellors and the 19 divorcees. Part A of this chapter describes the data collection and thematic analysis. Part B examines the counsellors’ reflections on the main reasons for their clients’ divorce. Part C explores the positive and negative outcomes of post-divorce adjustment. Part D then examines post-divorce adjustment, while Part E brings the focus of analysis to the factors that contributed to positive and negative post-divorce adjustments and growth. Finally, Part F examines the counsellors’ views on interventions and strategies that might have helped save their clients’ marriages.
Part A

Part A reports on a pilot study in which qualitative methodology was used to explore the counsellors’ views of their clients’ divorce experience. This section also presents information about the 12 counsellors and the reasons for recruiting them as research participants and brief discussion on the data collection and thematic analysis.

6.1 Pilot Study

A pilot study using a semi-structured interview was conducted involving two counsellors, a male and a female. The purpose of the pilot was to (a) confirm the suitability of the interview questions to be used for the 12 counsellors; (b) ensure that the seven research questions have a logical sequence; (c) confirm that both counsellors agree that the syntax is clear and easy to understand; and, (d) ascertain if the interview questions would be able to elicit data which could address the thesis’ research questions.

The final list of seven questions developed for the interviews with the 12 counsellors was similar to that used for the 19 divorcees, except that some changes were made in the wording in order to focus the counsellors’ attention on their perception of their clients’ experiences of divorce and adjustment instead on the counsellors themselves. Please see Table 6.1.

Each counsellor was informed in advance of the taping of interviews and guaranteed anonymity. Counsellors were also informed of their right to withdraw their participation at any time during the interview. They then signed a consent form to participate in the research before they were interviewed (Appendix D).
Table 6.1

*List of Questions for the Semi-structured Interview with Counsellors*

1. From your clinical experience, what are the commonly cited factors that contributed to divorce?
   
   Probes were used to identify examples of trigger events that the counsellor believed led to the decision for divorce.

2. If your clients were to look back:
   a) What do you think were the distressing outcomes your clients faced after they filed for divorce?
   b) What do you think were the positive outcomes that your clients faced immediately after they filed for divorce?

3. Based on the divorce cases you have handled, how well do you think your clients in general have adjusted to being divorced?

   **Probe:** “*In your mind were there any indicators that you would use in considering whether your client had adjusted well post-divorce?*”

4. Were there:
   a) negative outcomes after your clients' divorces were finalised?
   b) positive outcomes after your clients' divorces were finalised?

5. a) What did your clients think were helpful in getting through their divorces and what did they do to help them get through?

   **Probe:** “*Did your clients specifically mention what did they do to help them to adjust?*”

   b) Were there things in your opinion your clients could have done to help them get through the divorce?

   **Probe:** “*Did you recommend any interventions that the clients could have used to facilitate the divorce periods?*”

6. a) Were there any interventions that your clients thought that they could have taken to save their marriages?

   b) What are your personal/clinical views with regard to how clients could have saved their marriages if they wanted to do so.

7. Is there anything else you would like to tell me concerning the issue of divorce that you have experienced in your clinical practice?
The interviews with the 12 counsellors started in February 2009 immediately after the round of interviews with the 19 divorcees and ended in April 2009. Each interview lasted an average of 60 minutes and took place in the respective counsellors’ office. The researcher upheld the same confidentiality and anonymity towards the counsellors and their clients as she did for the divorcees in Study 2.

Permission was obtained from the counsellors to record the interviews on audio-tape for verbatim transcription later. The counsellors’ responses were then personally transcribed by the researcher, analysed and finally categorised into themes using thematic analysis. Each counsellor was shown the relevant transcript of his or her own interview. In the end, one counsellor requested a re-interview because of the unclear response due to some technical fault in the recording; and another made some changes to the transcript for greater clarity. Other than these two cases, the rest of the transcripts were left unedited as the researcher wanted to preserve the authenticity of the counsellors’ responses as much as possible. Just as in the reporting of Study 2, brief excerpts from the verbatim transcripts are used in this chapter to illustrate the themes and sub-themes identified in Study 3, but in this case the excerpts are from the interviews with the counsellors instead of the divorcees. Each excerpt is preceded by a reference to the counsellor concerned, as in the example:

Counsellor Number 2 (Male, Aged 59)

The themes that emerged from the analysis of the interviews with the counsellors were broadly similar to those derived from the data of the 19 participants and so were organised in like manner for presentation in this chapter. The broad similarities between the themes facilitated comparisons between the findings of Study 2 and Study 3.
6.2 Profile of Counsellors

The Singapore Association for Counselling (2009) website shows that there are 128 Registered Counsellors of whom 88 (69%) are women and 40 (31%) men. However, the sample in this study comprises more male counsellors than female ones – eight men (67%) and four women (33%). The counsellors were drawn from three ethnic groups with 10 (84%) of the counsellors being Chinese, one (8%) Indian and one (8%) Caucasian. As indicated in Table 6.1, all the counsellors interviewed had at least nine years of clinical experience and five (42%) of them had 20 years or more of extensive experience. Collectively the counsellors had among them 225 years of counselling experience. Their average age was 46 years at the time of interview. The counsellors came from a balance of private and government organisations; and they were specifically chosen for their large number of clients with marital problems. The predominant model used by the counsellors was the Marital and Family Therapy approach (nine counsellors – 75%). This was to be expected as most of their counselling work involved couples and families. The details of the 12 counsellors are presented in Table 6.1. As the focus of this study was more on the collective professional views of the counsellors than on individual narratives, unlike the 19 divorcees, the researcher did not assign names to them, only numbers. They were given an information sheet on the purpose of the interview and other administrative matters related to the research project (see Appendix E). Like the divorcees, the counsellors were asked to sign a consent form for an in-depth interview with the researcher (see Appendix F).
Table 6.2

**Profile of 12 Counsellors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counsellors</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Years of Counselling Experience</th>
<th>Counselling Approaches</th>
<th>Work Settings</th>
<th>Academic Qualifications</th>
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<tr>
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<td>15</td>
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<tr>
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<td>59</td>
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<td>35</td>
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<td>Church</td>
<td>Masters</td>
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</table>

**Part B**

**Section 1: Reasons for Divorce As Perceived by the Counsellors**

In Study 2 the participants gave varied reasons for their divorce, and the causes identified could be attributed to predisposing and precipitating factors. However, in Study 3 the counsellors observed that the identified triggers for marital dissolution might not be the actual reasons for divorce. From the analysis of the data gathered from the counsellors,
eight themes and six sub-themes were identified as reasons for divorce. These themes are tabulated in Table 6.3.

**Table 6.3**

*Section 1: Reasons for Divorce cited by 12 Counsellors*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes &amp; Sub-themes</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>5</th>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2 Interference from In-laws</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>1.3 Incompatibility</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>1.6 Growing Apart</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>1.7 Festering Multiple Problems</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>2</td>
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</tr>
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</table>
Theme 1.1: Adultery

Adultery was highlighted by 11 of the 12 counsellors, three women and eight men, (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12), as a reason for divorce. They, however, generally agreed that adultery in itself was not the cause of divorce; rather it was an obvious symptom of a failing marriage and thus conveniently used as a trigger for divorce. Nevertheless, the counsellors also remarked that affairs could happen when people availed themselves of the opportunities presented. They said that this was borne out by the increasing incidence of adultery in tandem with greater globalisation, where more Singaporeans undertake extended overseas postings. In addition, adultery could also take place if the marriage was already emotionally strained.

Counsellor Number 2 (Male, Aged 59) said:

“Extra-marital relationship would be a problem clients present but my assessment is adultery is more a trigger rather than a cause. It’s a trigger for thinking about divorce because it demolishes trust especially when there is an overseas posting and at work there can be opportunities to develop relationships.”

Some counsellors commented that in some cases, adultery might be deliberate and wilful in order to expose an irretrievably-failed marriage.

Theme 1.2: Interference from In-laws

Four counsellors (3, 4, 5 & 12) cited conflicts with in-laws as the cause of marital difficulties among couples. Such conflicts were seen as common and took on various complexities involving partners, siblings and even other relatives. Sometimes there was a certain unspoken reciprocity of resentment between the spouse and in-laws. A conflict between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law could unknowingly affect the spousal relationship resulting in continual unresolved issues and stress in the marriage.
Counsellor Number 4 (Male, Aged 46) commented:

“I have seen cases where both sides of the in-laws cannot get along and they are unknowingly fighting their parents’ agenda in the marriage. There are also other cases where it’s the wife’s relatives complaining about the husband’s families or there are cases where a wife would complain that her husband is like mummy’s boy.”

Theme 1.3: Incompatibility

A total of five counsellors (1, 5, 6, 7 & 9) highlighted incompatibility issues. Some couples, counsellors observed, might realise only years later that they were fundamentally incompatible in their philosophy, expectations, values, behaviour, and communication styles, sexual expectations and personality. Over time, these unresolved differences could become significant areas of conflict in their marriage. These personal differences are further categorised under the following sub-themes:

Sub-theme 1.3.1: Different Expectations

Two counsellors (5 & 7) noted that different expectations stemmed from different family upbringing or background of the husband and wife might cause differences in expectations, though unspoken during courtship. They said that some spouses came from very cohesive families that bonded closely; however, others hardly connected or shared information among family members.

Counsellor Number 5 (Male, Aged 55) related a case study:

“My client said: ‘Before my marriage, I don’t expect very much from him as a boyfriend. But after I got married I feel that he should tell me where he goes and who he goes out with. He should do what I request of him. But, then from the husband’s point of view ‘Am I reporting to you? Do you trust me or not?’ My client said that her husband basically comes from a family whereby if he doesn’t go home after work he doesn’t need to inform his family. But the wife’s family insists that to inform the family of her whereabouts is basic courtesy in a family.”

Sub-theme 1.3.2: Communication Issues

Three counsellors (1, 6, 7 & 9) mentioned the lack of communication could aggravate emotional distancing which might lead to a whole host of relational issues like
marital discord, emotional insecurity, withdrawal and abandonment, leading to 
deterioration in marital satisfaction.

Counsellor Number 7 (Female, Aged 41) related a case study:

“The husband comes back and he would be focusing on his computer and blanks 
her out. The wife might be watching TV in the room and over time they hardly talk and 
they co-exist only.”

Counsellor Number 1 (Male, Aged 50) explained from his perspective the type of 
communication problems raised by his clients during his 15 years of clinical practice:

“What we commonly identified as communication problem. But for me it is not 
communication as such, it is too general a word. I think it’s more like a difficulty in 
talking; in resolving issues; in having conversations without arguing and quarrelling.”

Sub-theme 1.3.3: Marital Dissatisfaction

Counsellors (1 & 6) observed that while in the past couples might cite lack of 
communication to express marital dissatisfaction, however, nowadays divorcees were more 
candid and forthright about saying they were dissatisfied with their marriage rather than 
use the term lack of communication.

Counsellor Number 6 (Male, Aged 50), discovered that lack of marital 
satisfaction may lead to divorce.

“I think the lack of marital satisfaction is one of the reasons that I am picking up 
now. Lack of communication was something that people used to express before but these 
days it’s really about marital satisfaction. And I have also seen more women coming 
forward, stating marital dissatisfaction as a reason for wanting to exit from the marriage.”

Upon further probing Counsellor (6) commented that they are dissatisfied that their 
spouses are financially not providing enough or they are not happy with intimacy issues.

Sub-theme 1.3.4: Sexual-related Issues

Sexual-related problems, though rare, were mentioned by two Counsellors (6 & 7) 
as a reason for marriage breakdown. Sexual problems were mentioned in the context of 
other problems in the marriage such as communication, intimacy and adultery. In many 
marriages the frequency of sexual intimacy might wind down after several years. The two
counsellors said that husbands might desire less frequent sex with their wives or some even not at all after a few years of marriage, probably due to reasons of stress, ageing, loss of libido, or other underlying medical reasons. Unless they shared their problems with their spouses, the wives might speculate that they had become unattractive and unappealing; or more seriously they might become suspicious that their husbands were having extramarital affairs. The counsellors added that the wives too might find their desire for sex waning over the years and make excuses avoiding having sex. Like the men, many women are subject to stresses at the workplace. Some counsellors believed that the load of child-raising and domestic chores could lead women to lose interest in sex due to fatigue; or they may even harbour resentment that the husbands fail to neither understand their situation nor help out more with household chores. Some women become preoccupied with the children to the detriment of their husbands’ needs. Other sexual problems like frigidity, impotence or painful intercourse could also lead to the death of passion and intimacy. The counsellors noted that while sexual issues could directly erode a marriage, there is a further risk factor in that they might indirectly cause one or both the spouses to stray in order to find satisfaction elsewhere.

As Counsellor Number 7 (Female, Aged 41) commented:

“Small proportion of my clients divorced over sexual problems. Although lack of sexual satisfaction accounted for a small portion of the divorces, it might have caused more divorces indirectly via adultery.”

Theme 1.4: Difficulty in Managing and Resolving Differences

Five Counsellors (2, 5, 8, 9 & 12) observed that it was not the couple’s differences that led to their divorce, but rather their inability to manage or resolve their differences. Often, such differences led to more serious webs of conflict, within which the couples were trapped, and the inability to manage and resolve them subsequently triggered divorce. As discussed earlier in Theme 1.3, the counsellors highlighted that the lack of communication
and the failure to resolve differences had led to more serious marital issues. For example, one party might have an intense need to know the whereabouts of the spouse at all times but the other might perceive this as an invasion of privacy or a suspicious distrust. When the different expectations were not met, the couples had difficulties accepting the situation and the conflict remained unresolved and left to fester.

**Counsellor Number 2 (Male, Aged 59) said:**

"I think it is important, you have to make a distinction between what is a legal reason versus what they present in a therapy session. Usually, it has to do with managing conflict in a relationship and the kind of difficulties in coping with the differences that lead to conflicts."

**Sub-theme 1.4.1: Philosophical Differences**

Three Counsellors (1, 7 & 9) mentioned that philosophical differences over matters like responsibility for finance and parenting styles could lead to divorce if they are not managed. For example, some women considered the husband should be responsible for the entire household expenses while their income was theirs alone. One of the conflicts in parenting style often cited was when one party believed in corporal punishment but the other disagreed strongly.

**Counsellor Number 9 (Female, Aged 33) elaborated on clashes in parenting style:**

"The most common ground clients come to see me is, of course, unreasonable behaviour. But if we explore a little bit more, they will say personality clashes, misfit and unable to communicate with each other. The more challenging event is when they become parents and even if a relationship is good but when it comes to parenting they cannot see eye-to-eye."

**Sub-theme 1.4.2: Personality Differences**

Four Counsellors (1, 6, 7 & 9) shared their views about personality differences. Their interviews highlighted many types of personality differences ranging from physical dispositions, attitudinal and value differences to personal habits and even inclinations. According to the counsellors, personality differences can be both constructive and tumultuous. They added that in a marriage, when opposites attract, the marriage may
blossom, however it can also become adversarial if the partners cannot leverage on the differences. Such differences they elaborated do not usually surface at the pre-marital stage but they may become acute jarring incompatibilities when the couples start to live together. The failure to manage these differences may lead to serious marital problems.

Counsellor Number 1 (Male Aged 50) shared an account:

“Some are just incompatible and basically they have little in common; they can’t get along. Their personalities are so different and their interest so diverse. They don’t even like what the other person like and even in sex issues they cannot compromise.”

Theme 1.5: Unreasonable Behaviour

Unreasonable behaviour was highlighted by five of the Counsellors (1, 3, 7, 8 & 9) as a reason for divorce. In fact, unreasonable behaviour was one of the most-cited grounds for divorce in Singapore. Given the vagueness of this term, it was important to attempt to ascertain what the divorcees actually meant when they accused their partners of unreasonable behaviour. From the examples given by the five counsellors, it ranged from mundane non-performance of domestic chores to outright profligacy and mental illness. The counsellors observed that some of their clients ascribed “unreasonable behaviour” to whatever one party did, to which the other disagreed vehemently; others dismissed it as a personality clash.

Counsellor Number 7 (Female, Aged 41) shared a typical scenario of unreasonable behaviour.

“The husband constantly preoccupied with computer games or working at the computer and doesn’t take the family out. He watches TV or does not give allowance to children; do not help to run the household.”

Theme 1.6: Growing Apart

The theme of growing apart is an all-inclusive phrase for all manner of distancing between couples. It can have many aspects and dimensions as unveiled extensively by 11
Counsellors (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12). The counsellors saw growing apart as an insidious process which crept into the couple’s life over time, often unheralded and unnoticed until an impasse was reached or a trigger for divorce was activated. The counsellors described this distancing as usually appearing after some years of marriage, often surfacing quite innocuously in various forms. For example, as a sense of a disappointment in the marriage; an inordinate involvement in career and work; a full attention focus on children; a lack of conjugal intimacy; a feeling of jaded relationship; a dissatisfaction with the partner’s physical appearance; or simply, for no apparent reason except the feeling that one has grown tired of the other. Such feelings invariably led to the oft-repeated communication problems which triggered a host of negative and destructive emotions. According to the counsellors, this drifting apart was also seen as a convenient opportunity for extra-martial affairs. Infidelity, therefore, was not seen as an event that happened suddenly or by chance, but rather a signal that the marriage was already hemorrhaging.

**Counsellor Number 6 (Male, 50)** echoed the views of the other counsellors.

“Clients will talk about extra-marital relationship. But it’s often stated in the context of other failures in the marriage, we don’t communicate, we’re not intimate together, and yes, by the way, he’s having another woman.”

**Theme 1.7: Festering Multiple Problems**

Three Counsellors (2, 5 & 11) believed that eventually some marriages would end because the couple’s problems had been piling up and left to fester for such a long time that it came to a point where the marriage could no longer be saved. In such instances, trust had been fractured, the bond worn off, and feelings depleted. The couple had reached the tipping point or the end of one’s tether, thus the only recourse for them was divorce.
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Counsellor Number 2 (Male, Aged 59)

“When clients get frustrated enough, they seek help. They come for therapy to solve problems which unfortunately sometimes it is too late because they are already at breaking point.”

Theme 1.8: Physical and Mental Abuse

Even more aggravating than unreasonable behaviour was marital abuse or violence, as mentioned by four Counsellors (1, 2, 9 & 11). Two of the counsellors felt that violence was usually set off by a verbal conflict, and over time, this developed into physical abuse. They believed that repetitive spousal violence might result in the victims seeking legal protection orders against the perpetrators. They have also seen clients suffering not only from physical violence but emotional abuse and threats, which very often led to separation and divorce.

Counsellor Number 9 (Female, Aged 33) said:

“I would say after the quarrel, they are not happy with what they have discussed. And then, there’s pushing and nudging or using things to hurt each other, door slam or physical abuse.”

Theme 1.9: Financial Issues

Five of the Counsellors (3, 4, 7, 9 & 11) mentioned financial issues as a reason for divorce. Such issues manifested in various forms for the couples such as, loss of employment; failure to provide financial support for the family (usually the men); gambling and debts; and profligacy and poor financial planning. These impinged on and exacerbated the strain in the relationship and stereotyped the effect of expectations. At times, money or the lack of it was identified by the five counsellors as one of the underlying reasons for divorce.

Counsellor Number 9 (Female, Aged 33) highlighted:

“There’s this expectation that husbands should work and bring back the money and if this did not happen, the couple would quarrel over money issues. Other expectations
could be, ‘Why is my husband not providing enough? Why must I pay for his loans and debts?’ Be it a failed business or owing money from friends, relatives, extended families, these are some of the financial complaints I hear from my clients.”

Summary

Although the counsellors did not distinguish between predisposing and precipitating factors it is obvious that the factors do not act in a linear progressive way, especially in a divorce which is a complex life-changing event and can be traumatic to some divorcees. Therefore, any of the issues or factors can trigger the divorce and any of the relational issues may impinge on the marriage. According to the counsellors, no single factor or issue had been cited as the only actual cause of divorce. Instead, it was observed that a confluence of events and causes led the couples to grow apart which eventually resulted in one party initiating the divorce.

Part C

Section 2: Positive and Negative Outcomes

Contrary to popular and simplistic perception, divorce is not all negative without any iota of positive benefit. Indeed, the emotions that follow a divorce are wide-ranging. Admittedly, while the counsellors reported that most divorcees experienced an overwhelming sense of distress and grief at the realisation that their divorce was final and absolute, many of them also felt a calming sense of peace shortly after coming to terms with their divorce. There were also a minority of counsellors’ clients who did not feel any negative emotion at all; instead, it was like an instant release from a painful and prolonged imprisonment. Based on the interviews with the counsellors, it was observed that divorces could have both positive and negative outcomes.
Section 2a: Post-divorce Positive Outcomes (+)

It is widely acknowledged that divorce can be traumatic and that it has a negative impact involving multiple problems before and after the final court session granting the absolute divorce. However, there are studies on post-divorce impact that found divorcees experiencing “improved functioning” and feeling “personally better off than they were during marriage” following their divorce (Weitzman, 1985; Wallerstein, 1986; Anderson, Stewart & Dimidjian, 1994). Anderson, Stewart & Dimidjian (1994) revealed a list of “universal qualities of single life that some women find extraordinarily valuable: freedom, independence, and most of all, self-determination.”

Apart from negative consequences, the counsellors believe that the states of post-divorce sometimes yield positive developments. Altogether, four themes and four sub-themes were gleaned from the counsellors’ accounts of the experiences of their clients. The themes, positive emotional feelings, identity change, parenting role, closure and moving on, essentially involve the self. Only the theme, parenting role, involves an external party, in this case, the ex-spouse. The positive outcome of this new parental role is crucial to the well-being of the children; hence, collaborative efforts from the ex-spouse are necessary to ensure that the “new family” is not seen as dysfunctional. The themes and sub-themes are listed in Table 6.4.
Table 6.4

Section 2a: Summary of Main Themes and Sub-themes: Post-divorce Positive Outcomes (+) Identified by Counsellors

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Themes &amp; Sub-themes</th>
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**Theme 2a.1: Positive Emotional Feelings (+)**

Many of the counsellors who were interviewed commented that most of their clients experienced positive emotional feelings post-divorce. They also commented that the petitioner are more likely to report positive emotional feelings. Another observation that they made was those without emotional involvement and affection for their ex-spouses adjust more successfully and they were happier than before divorce. They identified four sub-themes and they are feelings of relief; absence of tension and conflict; feelings of autonomy; and feelings of empowerment in a new role.
Sub-Theme 2a.1.1: Feelings of Relief (+)

Eight Counsellors (3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11 & 12) observed that their clients relished a sense of relief soon after the divorce. Spanier & Thompson (1984) also confirmed that over half of the men and women in their sample (separated 26 months or less) felt relieved following the divorce. Relief has been identified in various forms, and for some divorcees it presented “a new chance to begin anew” (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). This was also confirmed in the study done by the Ministry of Social Affairs in 1979 which established that by the time the final divorce decree was granted, many had been kept waiting with such suspense that they actually felt relieved (32.8%) when first informed of the decree. The counsellors reported that some of their clients reported a sense of vindication in having initiated the divorce and succeeding in getting the ex-spouse out of their lives. Given that divorce proceedings, particularly if the divorce was contested, would usually be tedious and emotionally sapping, the ending of the process would usually be greeted with a huge sigh of relief. According to the counsellors in the current study, it was a time for the divorcees to move on as they had been stuck in the process for many months if not years. Similarly too, women who had been regularly abused by their spouse felt a sense of liberation from the pain and suffering when the divorce became final. Most were also relieved and hopeful that after such a long period of conflict, acrimony and pain before and during the divorce process, they could look forward to savouring peace and quiet, and moving on to new a chapter in their life.

The counsellors believed that the initiators of the divorce would feel a greater sense of relief than their ex-spouse as they had already made their decision while their ex-spouse had no choice in the matter. Taken by surprise and possibly ambushed by this monumental life-changing event, the defendant may take a longer time to recover from the shock of the divorce. Some counsellors reported that the sense of relief depended on the
person’s belief system. In some religious communities, initiating a divorce is looked upon as a very shameful act. Therefore, under such a circumstance, the divorcees might experience a greater sense of relief if their unreasonable spouse initiated the divorce instead. Counsellor (12) said that in such a case, they would feel vindicated as they would not be seen as having violated their marriage vows; hence, they would even receive more sympathy as the perceived victim.

Counsellor Number 12 (Male, Aged 37) said:

“I think it depends on the belief system. For some church parishioners, the idea of initiating the divorce is very shameful for them. But if their awful, terrible spouse initiates it, then they haven’t done any wrong. So there are some people who feel a greater sense of relief when their spouse initiates a divorce instead of them, because then they feel that they haven’t violated their commitment. But there are others who prefer, or do better when they initiate the divorce because they have a better sense of control. If the belief is that divorce is really an awful evil thing that they are not allowed to do, then it helps if someone else initiates it.”

Sub-theme 2a.1.2: Absence of Tension and Conflict (+)

Divorced men and women who had suffered years of acrimonious quarrel, arguments, and marital discord found solace and peace when the divorce was finalised. Counsellor (2) observed that following the divorce, tension within the family eased, and this could benefit the divorcees, the children, and at times, the extended families.

Counsellor Number 2 (Male, Aged 59) said:

“The tension, especially for everybody in the family... in a sense there is positive outcome... that the tension would be minimized. Secondly, if they are not in conflict over custody and everything else, then what can happen is, the children need not experience tension, conflicts or be witnesses of conflicts, especially violence, ...so, once the divorce is over that helps them relax, it spills over to your relationship with children. So it could be easing of tension for the spouses, and for the children as well.”

Sub-Theme 2a.1.3: Feelings of Autonomy (+)

Six Counsellors (1, 2, 7, 8, 9 & 10) noted that along with the relief felt after the dissolution of an unhappy marriage, many clients experienced a sense of autonomy. The liberating feeling was particularly evident if the party had been under tremendous stress,
rage and depression, especially if it was an abusive relationship, or if the divorce had been a long challenging process. One counsellor compared such intense liberating sensations to that of a free-flying kite with the string cut off. Some counsellors said that their clients did not care what the future might bring as all they hungered for was to be immersed in a freedom of spontaneity, and such euphoria would usually happen immediately after the divorce. Unfortunately, time and the reality of the new situation would often work together to quickly temper this sense of elation.

The counsellors reported that the sense of autonomy experienced in such instances was not just an absence of restraints but an active surge to do whatever one wanted. Once the fetters were gone, women divorcees, more than men, felt readily able to make choices which were not available to them before. High among the options were to date again, to enjoy the benefits of being single, to pamper and splurge on themselves, and to realise latent and unfulfilled dreams and aspirations. The counsellors believed that despite the difficulties that divorcees faced in working through the challenges, they frequently enjoyed a new sense of freedom and the joy of not being restrained by or accountable to their spouses. Instead, they could be responsible for their own lives and be their own keeper.

Yet, the counsellors also noticed that some divorcees showed signs of ambivalent feelings even when the elation of gaining freedom was palpable, in that, while they genuinely relished their new autonomy, it was nevertheless clouded with a tinge of regret. Some women, though they had been liberated from an abusive marriage, still had lingering feelings for their ex-spouse. Such mixed feelings are understandable especially if the courtship and marriage had been a long one.

**Counsellor Number 8 (Female, Aged 42) said:**

“On one hand, the woman might want to make choices but she might fear that there is no one to lean on. Yet, she might feel: since I have the freedom, I should make my own decisions and enjoy the freedom.”
Sub-theme 2a.1.4: Feelings of Empowerment in New Role (+)

Counsellor (4) said that along with freedom and autonomy, some divorcees became more empowered following their divorce. The empowerment, according to the counsellors, was thrust upon them. He noted that in a generally male-dominated society in Singapore, “Women are by and large still expected to perform traditional gender roles in a marriage.” Being single again, the women had to manage many of the roles their spouses used to perform. In undertaking such roles, the women felt that they were in control and this feeling invigorated them to want to succeed for their children.

Counsellor Number 4 (Male, Aged 46) observed that the women, especially those who had been abused by their husbands, felt a sense of power coursing through their veins:

“I think most of them if they had been abused by their husbands and finally when they make their decision, there’s a sense of gaining control, and there’s a sense of strength... that they’re doing something about their situation, they have been stuck for many years... it can almost be liberating in a way... that they have finally taken control of their lives and there’s hope now. The prospect of staying with this man and see herself and her children abused by him, sort of gone or diminished, that makes a tremendous... relief... sense of being in control.”

Theme 2a.2: Identity Change (+)

Counsellor (2) explained that unlike a marriage, divorce has no social ritual or ceremony; instead the marriage dissolution implies explicitly a change in role or identity. Duran-Aydintug (1995) explained that divorce is a process of role-exiting and changing status and identity, and in some cases “role-distancing”. Counsellor (2) added that based on his 35 years of experience, the process of assuming a new role also signals an end to multiple roles like “ex-spouse”, “ex-in-law” or “lawyer’s ex-wife”. Ebough (1988) elaborated that role exiting meant disengagement and no longer accepting prescribed rights and obligations of a particular role, for example daughter-in-law needing to look after mother-in-law.
According to Counsellor (2) some divorcees, particularly the women, started to take better care of themselves after their divorce. They did not want the “archaic-self,” but would emphasize “self-care” which they might have neglected or played down during their marriage. After the divorce, women seemed to want a new “make-over”. Generally they wanted to improve their image, and would take steps to change their appearance for the better. Hence, the identity change was not restricted only to the societal and familial roles but also the physical appearance.

Counsellor Number 2 (Male, Aged 59) said that more women than men would make such changes because they saw a greater need to reinvent themselves.

“Men usually feel there is no necessity to change. If a man has his career that is the primary focus of the man. Even if a woman is a career woman, that’s not the primary focus of the woman. It includes home, children, everything else.”

Theme 2a.3: Parenting Role (+)

According to the five Counsellors (1, 2, 8, 9 & 11), some divorced individuals with children actually felt better able to carry out their parenting duties after their divorce than if they were to continue in their unhappy marriage. They could communicate more objectively with their ex-spouse about the upbringing of the child, about maintenance, visitation rights and even holidays for the child in a dispassionate way. The individual would be free to make such joint decisions with the ex-spouse without dragging along the emotional baggage of the pre-divorce period.

Counsellor Number 2 (Male, Aged 59) added:

“The other possible useful outcome is that after divorce both now can be agreeable regarding parenting and child care and they begin to see that there are things that they can do with their children which were not possible in the past.”

Before a divorced couple can re-establish their family arrangements successfully after their divorce, Counsellor (2) highlighted that it would help if the post-divorce family could be first be re-defined.
Counsellor Number 2 (Male, Aged 59) said:

“Very often in divorce, the positive outcome is that it frees people. The couple can appreciate that divorce does not necessarily lead to being labelled as a broken family for the children. There may be a change of mindset. And one of the things I tend to advocate nowadays is to help divorcing couples look at the post-divorce family in a different way. That it is not a broken family but a broken marriage. Because if you look at the child’s perspective, the positive thing is the child still has a family, a family re-defined by ‘I have a father, I have a mother’. Now, the difference is papa and mummy, they do not live together. They are not even married to each other. In that sense, you minimize the stigmatization on the child and the parents, also, hopefully would be less stigmatized because then they would not need to have this lingering guilt feeling that they have now brought the children into a broken family state.”

Theme 2a.4: Closure and Moving on (+)

Seven Counsellors (1, 3, 7, 8, 9, 11 & 12) believed that in order for divorcees to heal, they needed to find their own closure, especially in things connected to past trauma. Further, divorcees should let go of the previous roles they played in their married life, given that past identities might remind them of pain and trauma. Hence, wiping the slate clean and starting on a fresh page was a positive outcome that would assist in the healing process. Together with letting go and starting afresh, divorcees who accepted their divorce in a more philosophical way and not as a personal failure might find the closure easier and speedier. Accordingly, there would be a growth phase of personal development in the whole post-divorce adjustment. Counsellors also said that if there was a complete closure it would be easier for divorcees to move forward and re-engage themselves in meaningful activities and with the rest of society. They needed to find their own time and give themselves space to recover from the divorce as each individual would respond to the crisis differently. The closure could not be foisted upon them, because an externally imposed resolution in what essentially was an internal healing process seldom worked. Therefore, closure was best accomplished without external prompting or a fixed schedule. Complete closure and resolution were seen as an indispensable stage in the divorce process, the positive impact of which was evident.
Counsellor Number 11 (Male, Aged 40):

“When the couple is able to come to a closure, they are relieved that they are not officially related to each other and boundaries become clearer. Because during the separation, there are still things unsettled. When they come to the finality of it, things are clearer and they want to move on and it is easier. There is a close of a huge chapter of life.”

According to six Counsellors (3, 7, 8, 9, 11 & 12) moving on was something their clients looked forward to after their divorce. They saw a positive forward movement instead of being imprisoned in a status-quo loveless marriage. Ending the marriage was the best thing for many of them. Going forward, they saw an exciting new life, new hopes and the possibility of new relationships. Many women with children too saw a positive aspect of the divorce: the certainty and clear path ahead, and the choice to lead a more balanced life instead of being a “slave” to their spouse. With this new energy and new lease of life, some counsellors reported that their female clients were able to help others after their divorce. Some joined or formed support groups to give advice to and share experience with women going through a difficult marriage.

Naturally the transition was not always as rapid or as straightforward for all. Some struggled through the adaptation process, but most emerged unscathed. The counsellors saw this phase as an adjustment process which every divorcee had to go through – a critical change in life event such as a divorce would necessarily require adjustments, however uneventful the divorce.

Counsellor Number 9 (Female, Aged 33) reported that her client felt very excited at the prospect of living a new life:

“There’s one client after divorce, she looks different, her mannerism, voice, content of sharing, there’s a sense of hope. She said: ‘oh, I want to buy a new car’, that is an indication to me moving forward to a new life’. She sounds excited about this new chapter in life. Again, I am not denying that she is still coping but she’s eager to look forward…”

Counsellor (1) reported that after a period of positive adjustment, some of his clients were even able to regain their happiness and remarry. A number of them
experienced such good relationships with their ex-spouse that the new and former spouses were able to develop friendships.

Section 2b: Post-divorce Negative Outcomes (-)

The negative outcomes had five themes and 11 sub-themes and all 12 counsellors commented that their clients experienced negative outcomes post-divorce. However, the quantitative difference has no significance to the totality of the qualitative impact of divorce: the reason being that most of the clients who came to see the counsellors usually would be undergoing some negative post-divorce experiences. Table 6.5 indicates the negative responses described by the 12 counsellors.

Table 6.5

Section 2b: Summary of Main themes and Sub-themes: Post-divorce Negative Outcomes (-) Identified by Counsellors

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Table 6.5 continued

*Section 2b: Summary of Main themes and Sub-themes: Post-divorce Negative Outcomes (-) Identified by Counsellors*

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**Theme 2b.1: Negative Emotions (-)**

In Study 3, all the 12 counsellors reported negative emotions on the part of their clients after divorce. The emotional consequences of divorce are many and varied, and they are unique to each individual, although they may fall into discernible patterns.

Similarly, emotional responses may range widely from devastation to relief. Wallerstein (1986) concluded that older women were more inclined to experiencing unrelenting anger, which appeared to be rooted in feelings of hurt, humiliation and rejection. Loneliness was identified as another negative consequence of divorce; and this feeling was seen to affect the divorcees strongest when the finality of divorce sank in. Weiss (1975) suggested that there were two types of loneliness: emotional and social. Emotional loneliness stemmed from a lack of intimacy, while social loneliness resulted from a lack of social contact and activity.
Sub-theme 2b.1.1: Loneliness (-)

Four Counsellors (2, 3, 8 & 12) observed that one form of negative emotions which manifested itself readily after divorce was “emotional loneliness” as described by Weiss (1975). Ironically, divorcees could be busy looking after children, running household errands and earning a living, but they still felt a sense of emptiness because they no longer had a life-partner. They felt that friends, parents, siblings and even children could not completely substitute for the loss of a marriage partner.

Counsellor Number 12 (Male, Aged 37) commented:

“They can feel lonely because there's the sense of being isolated, being alone especially if you have children and you don't have the time to date. And so there's a lot they have on the plate.”

Sub-theme 2b.1.2: Shock and Denial (-)

Divorce was seen to bring with it a spectrum of negative emotions ranging from denial to despair. Four Counsellors (3, 4, 7 & 9) related that their clients experienced shock and disbelief when they did not have prior knowledge that their spouses were filing for divorce until they were served the legal papers. Although there might have been hints or signs that the divorce was impending, they still felt bewildered and traumatised when the papers were finally served. The four counsellors reported that even when divorcees might not have intense reactions when the divorce was filed, they still expressed shock and disbelief when the divorce became a legal reality. The shock was usually followed by an immense sense of loss and helplessness.

Counsellor Number 7 (Female, Aged 41) reported the range of feelings experienced by some of her clients.

“They cannot accept, they feel cheated or they feel that someone has done them wrong and this is not really what they expect of life, they said they are not prepared, they don’t want it, and they described the experience as unpleasant.”
Sub-theme 2b.1.3: Anger and Vengeance (-)

Two Counsellors (1 & 3) shared the accounts of divorcees experiencing anger or a desire for vengeance once the divorce papers had been served. Shock and denial could give way to anger, especially when the respondents realised that they had been accused of some unpleasant traits which reflected negatively on them. Once lawyers were introduced into the picture, the relationship between the spouses tended to become adversarial with each party seeking the best for themselves, and denying or frustrating the other party’s claims. The vehemence for revenge was often palpable and both parties would fight for custody over everything.

Counsellor Number 1 (Male, Aged 50) described, as narrated to him by his clients, the manifestations of the anger and vengeance played out in the courtroom by the divorcing couple.

“Well, of course one negative situation in which a spouse is fighting for custody and trying to impute a mental health condition on the spouse... That means, ‘I’m OK but you are the sick one and we’re divorcing because you have certain flaws in you.’ In this case, the spouse starts to attack the other by imputing negative suggestions in the other but in some situations, the man may try to punish the wife by trying to gain custody over his child even though the chances are very low. Or the wife starts to paint a very negative picture of the husband."

Sub-theme 2b.1.4: Anxiety and Worry (-)

Counsellor (9 & 10) highlighted that divorce often produced anxiety; and this could arise as a result of uncertainty in the divorce proceedings. Most divorcees undergoing the divorce process for the first time experience distress, and while sympathetic and experienced counsellors and lawyers can ameliorate the mental anguish to a certain extent, most divorcees are often left to pick up the broken pieces at the end of the divorce. They have to deal with the prospects of bringing up their children alone, managing the finances single-handedly, and coping with a whole host of responsibilities which were once shared.
Counsellor Number 9 (Female, Aged 33) reported:

“They usually experience a lot of anxiety that propel other emotions. They can be sad, anxious or they get worried. And then, parenting got affected, work got affected then it triggers many other related issues...”

Sub-theme 2b.1.5: Ambivalence and Mixed Feelings (-)

Four Counsellors (5, 8, 10 & 11) mentioned that it was also possible for divorcees to feel ambivalent about a divorce, adding that the more ambiguous the feelings, the higher the level of psychological instability experienced by divorcees throughout the divorce period. While some couples felt relieved that their marriage was over, two counsellors described their clients’ stories of mixed feelings – predominantly the feelings of uncertainty. For them, even when the divorce was finally completed, they still harboured lingering doubts and second thoughts, and these mixed feelings ranged from relief to intense nervousness and sadness.

Counsellor Number 5 (Male, Aged 55) said:

“There’s some people suffer a lot more because they go into a state of ambivalence after they file for divorce. Even after they filed for divorce they are uncertain. And their thoughts go back and forth. And it’s very trying and the mood goes up and down and they talk about their struggles.”

Sub-theme 2b.1.6: Regret and Self-blame (-)

Five Counsellors (3, 4, 5, 6 & 10) also highlighted self-blame as a negative impact of divorce for some of their clients. Typically, divorcees who have strong feelings about the sanctity of marriage blamed themselves for failing to keep the marriage vows. Others saw themselves as failures in life and a disappointment to their parents or parents-in-laws. They felt a deep sense of shame that they had brought disrepute to themselves and their families as they struggled to understand the reasons for their divorce. Even those who were successful in their profession suffered self-doubt as they found the divorce a humiliating experience and a serious blot on their lives.
Counsellor Number 3 (Female, Aged 50) said:

“I have a male client who told me he had such a sense of failure because he thought he should be able to save his marriage. Wives too experienced a deep sense of failure when they feel they could not keep their husbands from straying.”

Sub-theme 2b.1.7: Uncertainty and Insecurity (-)

Two Counsellors (10 & 12) also identified a sense of insecurity about the future as a negative impact of divorce for their clients. The uncertainty stemmed from the fear of growing old alone and the dreaded possibility of facing the community with the stigma of divorce hanging over them.

Counsellor Number 10 (Male, 50) observed that the stigma of divorce could lead to a sense of uncertainty:

“The negative part is a very uncertain future primarily for the females. If you are divorced and much more in Singapore then you have one negative label against you and this affects your sense of security.”

Sub-theme 2b.1.8: Grief and Loss (-)

According to six Counsellors (1, 2, 4, 8, 9 & 10), divorcees often experienced grief and the attendant pain following their divorce. They also noted that female divorcees were more likely to experience strong feelings at the announcement of the court’s final decision. They tended to report and show feelings of sadness and grief when the marriage was dissolved, although the men also experienced grief and a sense of loss. The despair was experienced throughout the entire process of the divorce and how soon it ended depended very much on the circumstances each encountered. Some divorcees felt intense grief when the outcome of the divorce was not in their favour while others felt a greater sense of loss and grief when their ex-spouse married someone else. However, most counsellors saw grieving as transitional, giving way eventually to the next phase of adjustment.
Counsellor Number 8 (Female, Aged 42) put it:

“Grief feelings... the family goes through the process because of the loss they experienced. Divorce is the loss and all different kinds of related loss. Each loss would have its emotional attachment, loss of dreams, expectations, hope, car, loss of house. ‘This is a matrimonial house I have. This is the house that I have to sell.’ We may see that it is only a house. But it has an emotional loss component.”

Theme 2b.2: A Burial Phase and Finality (-)

According to three Counsellors (1, 2 & 4) some of their clients viewed their divorce as a closure no different from that of a burial process, complete with sadness, grief and tears, and followed ultimately by the lowering of the casket into ground to be forever covered with earth. For others, it was an absolute full stop: an end of a phase of life. The feelings were likened to an overwhelming finality with no hope of resurrection.

Counsellor Number 4 (Male, Aged 46) captured the emotion.

“For some of them the reality really sinks in at that point. They know that it is really gone... as I said, it’s the sort of finality, sort of like this is real... and that’s it, you know, it’s a burial. We are each on our own. I think it’s that sense of finality.”

Theme 2b.3: Impact on Health and Mental Well-being (-)

Undergoing a divorce is a traumatic experience for most people, and the impact on a divorcee’s health and mental well-being can be devastating. Indeed, eight Counsellors, (1, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12) reported that their clients’ physical and emotional health had been impaired and that they experienced ailments that ranged from transient aches and pains to serious psychological scars. According to the counsellors, their clients felt stressed, had problems sleeping; suffered from eating disorders such as binging or loss of appetite; encountered difficulties in concentrating; experienced emotional imbalance; and suffered a loss of self-control, which led to substance abuse, smoking and drinking. Women reported taking medication and indulging in various distractions to avoid emotional and physical pain.
Counsellor Number 9 (Female, Aged 33) noticed that a number of divorcees suffered from such physical symptoms, such as headaches, physical pains and lethargy.

“I am hearing that they get headaches, generally feeling very lethargic, don’t know why. We can attribute it to, not having enough sleep and not eating well or not taking good care of self or even reporting that they can’t concentrate.”

Sub-theme 2b.3.1: Impact on Self-esteem (-)

Three Counsellors (1, 7 & 9) mentioned that a perennial concern was the women’s low or loss of self-esteem, especially in instances where they had to join or rejoin the workforce to seek gainful employment after their divorce. They expressed fear of being unskilled, especially in technology, and they worried about their inability to cope in a competitive corporate environment. Such problems are made worse for those who had not worked before or who had stopped working after marriage.

Counsellor Number 7 (Female, Aged 41) highlighted that this could impact negatively on women’s self-esteem. She said:

“A number of them whom I am seeing have not worked for some years. And, the sense of well-being and self-worth or capability is affected when they think about re-entering the job market. They worry about how technology has gone ahead, and they are feeling that they are lagging behind. They are uncertain if they are competent to do the job well. They are anxious about having to face others.”

Sub-theme 2b.3.2: Stigma of being a Divorcee (-)

Four Counsellors (2, 7, 10 & 12) emphasized that the divorce process could be emotionally and psychologically draining, especially for women who were observed to suffer more from being a single parent. They feared they might be criticised not directly as divorcees, but indirectly via the way they their children were brought up. This situation might also affect the children adversely in school and in turn, could create a higher stress level for the divorcees. The counsellors also observed that some divorcees attempted to hide their divorce status for fear of being ostracized, especially if they came from an austere religious community which did not endorse divorce. Another disadvantage to
female divorcees was the perception that - unlike a male divorcee - a divorced woman seeking remarriage in her forties with children in tow would be less attractive to eligible men.

**Counsellor Number 2 (Male, Aged 59)** said a stigma exists because other people besides the divorcee are affected by the divorce.

> “Whether you like it or not, stigmatization is still a very powerful impact of divorce. Because when you think of divorce, it is not a personal matter, it’s also like what we call it as community divorce. We always portray a divorced family with cracks all over the place.”

**Theme 2b.4: Parenting Challenges (-)**

According to the four Counsellors (1, 8, 9 & 11) a negative impact of divorce for both men and women is the need to continue meeting their spouse regarding the children, especially if such meetings are unpleasant, awkward, or adversarial. This parental responsibility could also become unbearable if divorcees experienced adverse reactions from their children, unsupportive parents, siblings and relatives. The situation could be emotionally draining for the parent especially if the children blamed the parent who initiated the divorce, however right he or she might have been. Obviously, it is easier to criticise the parent who is granted child custody than the absent one, as the former is also the one who has to bring up the children and manage discipline and punishment.

**Counsellor Number 12 (Male, Aged 37)** said:

> “Kids tend to release their emotions with the safest parent. And, the supportive (custodial) parent usually gets more criticism. One example, a divorcee's son whom I met the other day: the husband is irresponsible and the son said to her... there's no point, he's so terrible, and it’s easier just to agree with everything he says. So as his father criticises and insults his mum, he just agrees to everything. But then when he’s at home with his mum, he argues with his mum because he feels safe to be himself. So it becomes stressful for mum because he’s so well-behaved towards the father, so tough on her. So I think this is distressing.”
**Sub-theme 2b.4.1: Solo Parenting (-)**

Three Counsellors (2, 6 & 7) also highlighted another negative outcome of divorce: the responsibility of being a single parent. In most of the studies reviewed, women generally were the custodial parents (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Spanier & Thompson, 1984; Goldsmith, 1981; Kitson & Holmes, 1992). Divorcees were often seen to be anxious about the inability to meet the new challenges of being a single parent. The presence of children in the post-divorce family could have serious repercussions, notably the role overload experienced by the custodial parent who has to find time and energy to provide for the family and be a single parent at the same time. They may feel liberated initially and enjoy the freedom of bringing up their kids without interference from the spouse. But over time, the reality of single parenthood with its demanding physical, financial and mental stress may take its toll; and the clients reported feeling bitter about having to undertake the role. They were worried about the impact of a broken home on their children’s well-being, and they feared being labelled as a dysfunctional family. In addition, children might be an inhibiting factor in their parents’ desire to lead an active social life outside the home, especially when they want their children to perform well academically. Hence, in such a situation, most of the single parent’s spare time could be spent tutoring or supervising their children’s studies.

**Counsellor Number 7 (Female, Aged 41)** said divorcees are often anxious about not being able to meet the new challenges.

“I think, just the idea that, ‘God, I am really going to be a single parent!’... This is particularly true for those with children – the sense of instability and insecurity about finances. The financial threat and the self-esteem and doubting one’s capability in stepping out of the world to work or having to shoulder more responsibilities...”
Theme 2b.5: Financial Problems (-)

According to four Counsellors (8, 9, 11 & 12), both men and women suffer financially from a divorce. They felt that perhaps, the most challenging part of financial instability following a divorce is the individual’s inability to control or change the situation. According to Counsellors (8 & 9) men suffer financial loss when they have to pay huge alimonies, and sometimes they may even lose half their wealth. In spite of this, some women are financially worse-off after divorce. They commented that the situation is aggravated when the ex-husbands default on their child-support payment, driven either by their own financial problems or in wilful defiance of the court order.

Counsellor Number 12 (Male, Aged 37) related:

“The negative outcomes would be the financial impact and this is caused by husbands who don’t follow through the money that the court ordered them to do so. And, the wife goes to the court and the court brings back the husband. And then he pays one or two months and then he stops again or he gives less. This disrupts the wife’s life and it is stressful for the wife chasing the husband for the money and some give up.”

Summary of Positive and Negative Outcomes of Divorce

Two questions were addressed by the 12 counsellors on the possible positive and negative outcomes that divorce brought to the lives of their clients. Several of the counsellors reported the stages in the adjustment process similar to those described in the grief or bereavement process. It appears that from the counsellors’ perspectives these stages do not occur in a fixed order or singly, but are likely to recur, and even to occur simultaneously.

The counsellors reported that emotionally, divorce took a huge toll on divorcees. Under the main theme “negative emotions” eight sub-themes were identified. The initial feelings of shock and denial on facing the finality of divorce might be followed by anger, anxiety, worry, emotional loneliness and feelings of uncertainties, as reported by the counsellors. Such negative and destructive emotions, according to the counsellors, are
manifestations of a sense of failure and disappointment at being unable to hold the marriage together. The high financial cost of the divorce and the possible negative impact of divorce on the children also weigh heavily on both male and female divorcees.

The impact for each divorcee following divorce is not a uniform one; however, there are certainly similar themes running throughout the different counsellors’ narratives. From a financial point of view, their clients were more concerned about their ability to cope. This had to do with their perceived level of financial adequacy and, in the case of the women, the fear of their ex-spouses not adhering to the court orders concerning monthly maintenance payments. According to the counsellors, women given custody of the children experienced the daily stresses of single parenting, juggling a career and maintaining a home. These women felt the onerous burden of responsibility as single parent. In terms of social stigma, the counsellors said that many divorcees expressed some degree of shame and embarrassment over their status.

The counsellors’ observations on positive outcomes after divorce were categorised under four main themes and four sub-themes. The counsellors reported that some of their clients felt “happier now” and “relieved of a burden”. For many of them, the peace and quiet gained after the ex-spouse left home made them “feel at ease”, “no longer afraid” or “no longer ashamed” as “there is no more quarrelling now”. Overall there was this satisfying sense of complete relief and release. One positive thing that the divorce brought to their financial situation was that many of them strived to be financially independent. Even if they might not be financially better off, the sense of freedom and release from an unhappy marriage more than compensated for the lack of material well-being.
Part D

Section 3: Indicators of Post-divorce Adjustment

The major factors that affect recovery after a divorce are no different from those that affect the marriage. How a person adjusts after a traumatic or life-changing event depends on the relationship during the marriage, such as whether there were the presence of conflicts and infidelity, and also on fundamental issues like finance and the length of time since the divorce. The counsellors believed that eventually all divorcees would recover from the divorce and that they would adjust to their new status according to each individual’s circumstances. While most agreed that there is no complete recovery from divorce, they also discovered that some divorcees adjusted to their divorce quite speedily and were genuinely delighted that their marriage was over. The counsellors identified two major issues, adultery and conflicts during marriage, as impediments to adjustment. Similarly, there are issues and factors that tend to promote adjustment. From the interview with counsellors, 10 themes and six sub-themes that help to hasten the process of recovery were identified.

Out of the 12 counsellors, only four (7, 8, 11 & 12) were able to give some ratings on how well their clients adjusted after their divorces. Mostly, these counsellors gave a score of “7 to 9” out of 10 indicating “Very Well Adjusted” or “Well Adjusted”, using a similar system of scoring as for the 19 divorcees’ self-ratings. However, according to the four counsellors the initial score, at the time when the divorce papers were filed, was only 2 to 3, indicating a struggle to adjust. At that time, many of their clients were very stressed and experiencing much self-doubt and even self-pity.

Counsellor (9) said that outwardly in terms of inter-personal skills, mannerisms, appearance and outlook, divorcees may show tremendous improvement surpassing even their dispositions during the pre-divorce period. However, Counsellor (11) said that
emotional healing could take much longer; and as divorce is an indelible mark on one’s life, forgiveness is usually difficult for some divorcees.

Counsellor Number 11 (Male, Aged 40) saw recovery as both internal and external and gave different ratings for each. He said:

“I would say for interpersonal communication and process recovery is 7 to 8 points. But inner healing... the process takes longer, I mean, forgiveness is usually incomplete. It's often about 5 to 6.”

Richardson (2002) described the resiliency process almost like the adjustment phase in response to disruption as two main stages: the first stage involved fear, hurt, confusion and guilt, and as time passed the individual would begin to adapt and reintegrate. The counsellors described the process of reintegration as (a) learning to solve problems; (b) coping better; (c) achieving self-mastery; and, (d) re-gaining independence. Counsellor (7) reported that one measure of recovery is to monitor how well the divorcee is able to revert to everyday life.

Counsellor (11), however, saw adjustment as more complex than Counsellor (7) and took three areas into consideration in his assessment. Counsellor (11) came from a mediation centre which has drawn up a set of criteria to facilitate the evaluation of whether clients have come to terms with themselves and the divorce, and whether they are ready for the recovery phase.

Counsellor Number 11 (Male, Aged 40) reported:

“In my organization, we use a couple of benchmarks. One is how much they themselves have come to terms with it and are able to move on. This is a kind of verbal indication. The second criterion is how well they maintain contact. That is also very much in line with our mediation style. We can't have the marriage, fine, but both can still maintain communication. That will be good for the relationship and for the overall well-being of the pair... And we have couples who still turn to each other for help despite divorce... And, occasionally the ex-husband will stay over to look after the kids after divorce. And the third benchmark that we are looking at is their willingness to consider another marriage. That is more long-term that is harder to see. For the first two, they are easier to assess.”
In contrast to counsellors who were able to define recovery and measure adjustment, four Counsellors (2, 4, 5 & 6) commented they could not measure their clients’ adjustment and recovery because of insufficient follow-up. Generally, clients see counsellors when they encounter problems in their marriage that they cannot manage themselves. Once the decision to divorce is taken and the papers filed, there is little involvement of the counsellors. And counsellors do not as a matter of local practice have long follow-up sessions with clients. While some divorcees may continue to see their counsellors post-divorce, it is mainly for reasons related to their children well-being. Hence, given the paucity of data, most counsellors did not feel able to comment realistically on their clients’ recovery; nor were they willing to put forward any aggregate number on recovery. What they agreed on was that adjustment takes time.

According to Counsellor Number 2 (Male, Aged 59):

“I think that’s difficult to answer, because we don’t have enough follow-up with clients who finally divorced. Very often, the majority of them don’t come back. My experience is, very often when a couple reaches a point when they start to contemplate divorce proceedings, they do not see the value of counselling anymore. Because their intention for counselling is only to salvage the marriage and once that doesn’t seem to be succeeding, tendency is one or both will drop out.”

In analysing the counsellors’ narratives for factors that might have affected the post-divorce adjustment of their clients, the thematic analysis will once again be presented as positive and negative factors.

Part E

Factors Affecting Positive and Negative Post-divorce Adjustment

Section 3a: Factors Affecting Positive Post-divorce Adjustment (+)

Ten main factors that contribute to positive post-divorce adjustment have been identified and they include, emotional distancing; ability to let go and start afresh; time
heals, financial security; the resilient personality; support networks; engaging in
meaningful activities; managing grief process; enhancing self-care and self-esteem; and
having children. They are listed in Table 6.6. Under support networks six sub-themes were
also identified.

### Table 6.6

Section 3a: Factors Affecting Positive Post-divorce Adjustment (+)

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### Table 6.6 continued

**Section 3a: Factors Affecting Positive Post-divorce Adjustment (+)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes &amp; Sub-themes</th>
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### Theme 3a.1: Emotional Distancing (+)

Three Counsellors (2, 7 & 11) commented that separation is an intricately woven situation which usually encompasses several dimensions, including sexual, psychological, emotional and spiritual distance. However, they generally agreed that a couple whose relationship had already been distant before the divorce would find it easier to adjust.

Similarly, it is not uncommon that couples who have gone through a de-facto divorcing process before the actual and legal divorce would be able to accommodate the final separation better. According to Counsellor (2), adjustment for both parties was easier when they realised and accepted that the union was artificially kept together because of social or religious pressure. Such an acknowledgment would take the pain out of divorce and help to facilitate the adjustment process.

**Counsellor Number 2 (Male, Aged 59)**

“The legal divorce is just legalizing the divorce. I observe a divorce process taking place. For example, some of the dimensions could be sexual divorce, emotional divorce and they (the two parties) are not connecting. There is economic divorce; they care only for their own finances. And spiritual divorce, they don’t hate each other, but they don’t feel connected spiritually. And finally it’s the legal divorce. So very often I find the other
dimensions already existing in the marriage and that’s why I often offer this idea that you
can have a form of marriage without the substance. And they are together partly because
of the institution, because of religion, social pressure so they are kept together. So in that
sense, if they have appreciated that, it becomes a bit easier to adjust. Because then there’s
an acknowledgement that maybe there wasn’t much of a marriage anyway. So that helps.”

Theme 3a.2: Ability to Let Go and Start Afresh (+)

Another factor cited by three Counsellors (2, 7 & 11) that assisted post-divorce
adjustment is the ability to let go and start afresh. Counsellor (7) observed that the ability
to let go stemmed from the divorcees’ acceptance that the relationship has changed, and
that they could manage the present without reference to the failed relationship or the past
event. She further added the more they held on and kept themselves in constant denial,
the more difficult the adjustment would be because it might cause them to blame
themselves, and unknowingly indulge in self-pity. This inevitably would affect the children
and the adjustment process. Counsellor (7) also highlighted that some divorcees either
went into self-blame or struggled with the reality that the marriage had indeed broken
down. She added that what would help them move on would be the ability to let go and
come to terms with their divorce. This ability to let go is supported by much of the
literature surrounding divorce adjustment which suggests that any continued attachment is
somehow pathological, and thus emphasises the necessity of breaking emotional bonds
with the ex-spouse (Berman, 1985; Kitson, 1982; Reibstein, 1998).

According to Counsellor (11) who was working in a mediation centre believed that
counselling from a neutral third party may be seen as helpful for divorcees to let go
because it moves the internal dialogue away from the responsibility of the divorce to an
acceptance of the situation. The focus in this counselling is not about right and wrong or to
apportion blame, but the acknowledgement of the decision made to divorce, regardless of
who made the decision. It helps individuals to realise that they have tried their best to save
the marriage, and in turn that the failure of the marriage is thus not equivalent to one’s
failure as a parent or person. He further added that of course external practicalities are just as important as internal dialogues when it comes to moving on. Accepting that the marriage is over and discussing things together are helpful to the healing process. Making arrangements for the children may be seen as especially helpful in this area as it can help shift the focus from laying blame to how the couple can work together for the good of their children.

Counsellors (2 & 7) viewed it differently, they believed that letting go of the past is also about looking to the future and having a goal. However, some individuals, having lived many years with their spouse, do not know what they really want and are unable to see the possibilities ahead. Counsellors said they often have to remind divorcees of their new-found freedom and that they can still start their life again.

Counsellor Number 7 (Female, Aged 41) believed that focusing on future possibilities is especially important for the abandoned party:

“For the person who has been dumped... there is an important bit of work to look at possibilities, hope and changes that are possible.”

Finally, another factor that helps a divorcee to move on is to come to the realisation that marriage should not be the goal of life and that one can enjoy a full life without being married.

Counsellor Number 2 (Male, Aged 59) said:

“I think it’s important if they can again see the self and personal well-being. And realise that there’s more to life than a marriage. Because too often, you see, this is linked to again this expectation that to have a fuller life and to have enjoyment of life, you must get married. And almost like marriage is the ultimate, you know, a goal of life, that kind of thing. But if you make life as life, regardless of marital status whatever. If someone could pay less attention to the notion that I am not in a marital relationship.”

Theme 3a.3: Time Heals (+)

Three Counsellors (1, 4 & 12) commented that adjustment takes time, and research has shown that generally, women need between two and three years following separation
to stabilise their lives (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Thabes, 1997; Booth & Amato, 1991). Most counsellors did not want to suggest an actual adjustment time for healing, but Counsellors (1 & 4) thought it should take three to six months for divorcees to stabilize after the filing for divorce, and perhaps another three to four years for adjustment. Most counsellors emphasised that divorce is a traumatic experience for most people; hence, the recovery is seldom painless or smooth. They added that most couples would struggle, stumble and muddle through the divorce process. But eventually, they would manage and even improve, though not necessarily recover fully. Counsellor (2) reported that few people could claim to be completely divorced in the sense that they would still feel that the partner remained a part of them although they were legally and physically separated. Thus, while time may be the balm of all pain, the speed of healing depends very much on the support system available to the clients. It is also acknowledged that while it is easier to get over physical suffering, the emotional scar remains and this can take a very long time to heal – if it ever completely heals at all.

Counsellor Number 4 (Male, Aged 46) believed that divorcees need time to get over their divorce as it is, in most cases, a painful experience.

“It is a traumatic and a very horrible experience for most of them. But I would say most of them, over time, come to grips with it and certainly many of them move on. I recently met a client whom I saw maybe about 10 years back. Saw him in another context, and he came up to me and I really did not have recollection. He told me he has a decent relationship with his ex-wife and two kids. He has visitation rights, takes the children out, and they are still good parents to the kids... it's a cliché that time heals but I think time does play a part... Of course, there are those who are bitter and over time get worse. Some of my clients who were divorced are happily married now.”

Theme 3a.4: Financial Security (+)

Five Counsellors (2, 3, 8, 9 & 11) believed that economic stability or being financially well-off is another key factor that can help in post-divorce adjustment. It appears that financial security rather than income would contribute to one’s well-being
following divorce (Spanier & Thompson, 1984). Perhaps the most surprising aspect of post-divorce research is that several studies reported improved functioning following separation and divorce (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Weitzman, 1985; Wallerstein, 1986; Anderson, Stewart & Dimidjian, 1994). Indeed, according to five counsellors, even the older and longer-married housewives who had suffered the greatest financial hardships after divorce (and who felt the most economically deprived, most angry and most ‘cheated’ by the divorce settlement) said they were “personally” better off than they were during marriage. Three Counsellors (2, 3 & 11) commented that the more secure the financial situation, the less difficult the adjustment would be. However, the counsellors cautioned that one’s financial security is a very personal and subjective thing and needs to be explored from the divorcees’ perspective.

Counsellor Number 3 (Female, 50):

“I would definitely check out about their financial status. If they have stable finances, supportive family and close friends, they usually do better. However I have seen a case in which through the divorce she would get at least three million dollars but she still had a need to fight with him for his father’s property and savings even though his dad is still alive. The interesting thing is she came to this marriage, according to her, with only $6,000.”

Theme 3a.5: The Resilient Personality (+)

Two Counsellors (1 & 2) said that another factor that has contributed to the ease of adjustment is the concept of a resilient personality referring to those who thrive under very stressful conditions and events. Kobasa (1979) found that stress-hardy individuals have an internal locus of control and possess the characteristics of self-control and commitment. They appear to cope and adapt better to stressful events and they spend less time and effort dealing with issues that are beyond their control. In addition, they have an ability to recognise their own “distinctive values, goals and priorities” and are able to appreciate their capacity to “have purpose and to make decisions”.

Counsellor Number 1 (Male, Aged 50) observed that some clients have more resilient personalities than others, and this is one reason why they adjust better to the dissolution of their marriage. He said:

“People can adjust very well when they face the crisis. Some personalities are more resilient than others. And people who have a personality disorder condition do not adjust as well when things don’t go their way.”

Theme 3a.6: Support Networks (+)

The 12 counsellors believed that an individual needs resources and external support from others such as family, friends, professional counsellors and support groups to adjust to divorce.

Sub-theme 3a.6.1: Emotional Support from a Sympathetic Listener (+)

According to four Counsellors (2, 5, 9 & 11), divorcees have a need to talk to someone about their divorce as a way of coping with it. The very experience of receiving support and understanding is therapeutic to them even though there may not be a solution in the end. The crucial factor here is a non-judgmental and critical listening ear. It is not always appropriate for divorcees in this distressing state to confide in strangers; hence, somebody they can trust, such as a good friend or a close family member, would be helpful. Joining a support group would also be an option where there is comfort in sharing, and where one feels that one is not alone in the predicament. Once a divorcee feels a sense of relief and comfort, he or she is more ready to open up and talk candidly about the distress they are feeling. Such outpourings to a sympathetic listener are immensely therapeutic and uplifting.

Counsellor Number 5 (Male, Aged 55) highlighted the importance of supportive listening with understanding:

“I think one of the things that seemed to be very important to many people who go through the process of this divorce is to have someone to listen to what struggles they had undergone in a marriage.”
When people share, they look not only for a listening ear but also for emotional reinforcement. Beyond moral support, the comforting reassurance that they are not alone to face the world as divorced persons is decidedly helpful for the recovery. Such a reassurance, which is best provided by friends, family members and support groups, provides solidity and is indispensable for speedy adjustment. Without such a network or if divorcees do not actively seek out help, they may find adjustment difficult and tedious.

Counsellor (5) highlighted that practical assistance from family members also provides divorcees with emotional reassurance. The availability of their family help the divorcees to realise that they are not alone in their struggles.

Counsellor Number 5 (Male, Aged 55) said:

“People who have very good family support normally survive well. Because their children are supported by their extended families, they normally feel the sense of being morally supported. They don’t have to do everything on their own. So they can, in a Chinese phrase, ‘pang sim’ (let go of their worries). Let the mother or father or extended family look after the children.”

Sub-theme 3a.6.2: Getting Professional Help (+)

All 12 counsellors commented that getting any kind of professional help would be an important factor to cope with the stressful event. They said that when individuals do not get the support they need from their social network, and when they feel that they are caught in a hostile community and are faced with unsympathetic parents and siblings, they might turn to professional help. They felt that there are also those who choose to keep everything to themselves and not let friends or family know of their problems because of fear and shame. For these individuals, they would rather seek a neutral party for help and solace. However, for counselling to be effective, Counsellors (1, 2, 4 & 7) shared that divorcees need to be prepared to be candid and articulate what they want out of the counselling sessions. In addition, some counsellors feel they must have the stamina and
determination to want to work on the problems with the counsellors over an extended period.

According to Counsellor (2) counselling can help divorcees deal with non-acceptance from their religious community.

“Strangely enough, I have a lot of clients who have very strong religious background and usually it is negative response to divorce. At the end of the day, we’re saving lives, not necessary saving marriages. So we talked in terms of the sanctity of life more than the sanctity of marriage, which in the religious framework, they always talk about the sanctity of marriage. But unfortunately if you hold up sanctity of marriage over everything else, then you tend to save a marriage at all costs. But if you uphold sanctity of life over everything else, it may or may not include a marriage and in the end, there’s still life.”

**Sub-theme 3a.6.3: Joining Divorcees’ Support Group (+)**

Two Counsellors (8 & 9) from the government family service centres advocated that to supplement professional help and support from family and friends, divorcees may sometimes turn to support groups where they can meet other divorcees. These groups help them adjust by filling in information gaps that other support groups are unable to provide. The benefits derived are real and obvious as the information and advice are provided by people who have gone through the divorce process. Of particular assistance to them will be information on legal matters surrounding the divorce process. In addition, such support groups provide inspiration for divorcees to want to succeed, and listening to testimonies of those who have survived and coped successfully with divorce is reassuring and motivating. Such support groups provide more than information; indeed, they give moral support, build confidence and offer hope for tomorrow.

Counsellor Number 9 (Female, Aged 33) said:

“When new divorcees attend divorce support groups. They hear from them how to cope. Maybe with issues on loneliness, single parenting, they can get the support they need and they need not feel that they are alone coping with the situation. They can then feel empowered and confident.”
Divorcees also look to support groups for emotional and psychological support. In a homogeneous group of divorcees, it is easier for individuals to find someone who can empathise with them and understand what they are going through.

**Counsellor Number 8 (Female, Aged 42) said:**

“They expressed hurt, pain and anger towards their ex-husbands. If they tell their family members they may say I told you he was like that, now you asked for it... But when they talk with other divorcees, they get support from them.”

**Sub-theme 3a.6.4: Support from Employer (+)**

Another form of support that two Counsellors (9 & 12) saw helpful to post-divorce adjustment is support from the divorcees’ employers. Such support and understanding from the workplace make it easier for the divorcees to settle back to the routine of career and work with minimal disruptions.

**Counsellor Number 9 (Female, Aged 33) shared:**

“Some are comfortable telling their supervisors and say ‘look, my family situation is this...’ they got help from them, so it is less stressful when they are supported by their superiors.”

**Sub-theme 3a.6.5: Approaching Court Mediators (+)**

Two Counsellors (1 & 11) also highlighted the importance of court mediators, who he felt are often helpful in managing acrimonious divorces where the parties are in disagreement over finances or children. According to him, without mediators, divorce proceedings could become even more protracted and adversarial.

**Counsellor Number 1 (Male, Aged 50) said:**

“The court or counsellor mediator would talk about finances, custody, visitation rights before it goes to their lawyers. Because once it goes to the lawyers, it tends to be more adversarial. And if there’s no mediation advocated, then lawyers tend to be very adversarial.”

**Sub-theme 3a.6.6: Getting Religious Support (+)**

Three Counsellors (1, 2 & 3) felt that besides providing spiritual solace for those going through a divorce, religious support also played a part in salvaging marriages.
Counsellor Number 2 (Male, Aged 59) raised the possibility of helping people transcend their marriage breakdown through religion. He said:

“I noticed that some of them who are religious, this can be quite a useful factor because they can try to transcend whatever experience they had and look at it from a spiritual perspective. Maybe they can turn to God or the spiritual aspect and use it to salvage their marriage.”

Theme 3a.7: Engaging in Meaningful Activities (+)

Five Counsellors (1, 2, 8, 9 & 12) commented that the availability of social support was seen as necessary but not sufficient to some divorcees in their adjustment process. According to the counsellors, some divorcees continued to brood over the dissolution of their marriage even after the case had been closed. In such instances, counsellors usually recommended that these divorcees keep themselves busy.

One way to do so, as suggested by the counsellors, is through work because employment can be a pivotal aspect of a new life pattern, especially if it also provides a source of social support. Employment can also be an arena in which mastery, independence and competence develop, contributing to enhanced self-esteem and self-efficacy (Bisagni & Eckenrode, 1995; Anderson, Stewart & Dimidjian, 1994). Men usually immerse themselves in their work to distract themselves from the pain of divorce. Women, on the other hand, do not generally bury themselves in work or use work as the main distraction from their divorce. They have other alternatives such as focusing on bringing up their children. Counsellors observed that it is helpful to focus on the demands of child-raising in the transition to life after divorce, adding that divorcees dedicating time to their children will also help ease the pain and bewilderment of their children. The counsellors also commented that at the personal level, taking up a hobby, participating in sports, and having a rich social life with friends and colleagues will help ease adjustment.
However, some counsellors believed that there was no need to do make any great change in activities, adding that making a little difference to the normal routine of life would be sufficient. According to them, managing mundane things such as household chores and running the usual errands help remind divorcees that there is nothing spectacular about divorce, and that they should focus on what they have to do instead of the bad feelings from the divorce. Counsellor (12) felt there was no need to do anything special. He believed adding some spice to the usual routine would be enough because focusing on the ordinary will help bring people back to normalcy.

Counsellor Number 12 (Male, Aged 37)

“To me doing the mundane things means they are living life. You start to engage with others again. I think sometimes we get in such despair because we stop and don’t do anything. While we feel we have to settle the despair before we get back to life.”

Theme 3a.8: Managing the Grief Process (+)

Two Counsellors (2 & 8) said it is important that divorcees allow themselves time and space to grieve, and that counsellors should help them get over the grief. The corollary is that if grief is not manifested in some visible form, then adjustment may not be possible or easy. Grief, like other negative emotions, must be expunged in order for adjustment to progress.

Counsellor Number 8 (Female, Aged 42) said:

“Once they give themselves the space to grieve, to experience their emotions in a safe environment... It could be with professionals or family members. Letting out their emotions was one way for them to start looking at it.”

Theme 3a.9: Enhancing Self-care and Self-esteem (+)

Three Counsellors (1, 2 & 10) mentioned that along with grief, divorcees often struggle with self-blame and self-pity. Thus, as highlighted by Counsellor (10), rebuilding clients’ self-esteem helps in their adjustment. Divorcees who embarked on self-care and
rebuilding of their self-confidence revealed that they could put the focus back on themselves rather than wallowing in their divorce. This is helpful because many people tend to lose themselves in the divorce process. As part of the adjustment process,

Counsellor Number 10 (Male, 50) commented that divorcees should embark on self-development and re-establish their own identity.

“When they get married one of the common things to do is that you bury yourself in the life of the other person. I certainly think that if the person would have some sense of their own personal identity and create the career, create the hobby, create their own financial goals – I think that would be very helpful.”

Theme 3a.10: Having Children (+)

The six Counsellors (1, 2, 4, 8, 9 & 12) highlighted that post-divorce adjustment depends largely on whether the couple has any children. However, counsellors differed in their views if this helped or hindered the process of adjustment.

Two Counsellors (8 & 9) believed that it would be easier for a person without any children to adjust to the divorce as there would be fewer contentious issues such as custody and visitation rights to fight over, and fewer complicated maintenance issues to resolve. As children are often used as emotional blackmail in a divorce, without them the couple could more quickly move on and start life afresh. Counsellor (12) said that some of his female clients felt that children were liabilities in a divorce. They were an additional burden when the women decided to move on with their lives and remarry. Their prospects of suitors and marriage partners might be considerably lessened if they had children in tow, and this would affect adjustment.

Counsellors (1, 2 & 4) held a contrary view, saying that children could be a blessing in the adjustment process. As discussed earlier in Theme 2: “Ability to let go and start afresh”, amicable settlement of custody and visitation rights may actually foster a better relationship between the divorced parents as they focus on the upbringing of their
children. For some women, children are a source of their strength and determination to move on. They see their children as their lifelines and a rallying point on which to focus their attention. Having children could thus make adjustment easier as the women have something precious to hold on to. Children can also be viewed as a therapeutic distraction from the harsh and often cruel divorce aftermath.

Counsellor Number 4 (Male, Aged 46) highlighted that having children made adjustment easier for people, as their focus would be directed away from themselves to their children.

“...actually for some, the children become a source of strength, a way to organize and refocus their lives. For some it becomes a rallying point, especially if the circumstances of the marriage had never been good. The father had not been there; not been a provider; and had been abusive. And then they (the female divorcees) finally see this whole thing as a closure not just for themselves, but for the children. Then the children can become a big source of strength, and source of motivation.”

Section 3b: Factors Affecting Negative Post-divorce Adjustment (-)

There are two themes or factors identified by the researcher that adversely affect recovery after divorce, and they are adultery and marital conflicts (Table 6.7).

Table 6.7

Section 3b: Factors Affecting Negative Post-divorce Adjustment (-)

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</table>
Theme 3b.1: Spouse’s Adultery during Marriage (-)

One of the factors considered affecting recovery and adjustment as observed by seven Counsellors (1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, & 11) is infidelity during the marriage. Counsellors (1 & 2) commented that the recovery process would be made more difficult and acrimonious if there was a third party involved. The spouse would tend to feel cheated and betrayed; and the more religious ones might feel the marriage to be violated and defiled. They added that this could have strong implications towards recovery and reconciliation during or after the divorce. Hence, Counsellor (11) believed that divorce due to sexual infidelity would be harder to accept and the cheated spouse might find it more difficult to adjust post-divorce. However, two Counsellors (1 & 11) reasoned that affairs are just symptomatic of an already failed marriage, and that adultery might at times not be the root cause of the divorce. Even so, in instances where the spouse could consider the infidelity as not a betrayal, the adjustment might be just a little less traumatic – infidelity as a fact remains.

Counsellor Number 3 (Female, Aged 50) highlighted the difficulty of adjustment if the actual cause of divorce was adultery.

“I think the reasons for divorce also impact on adjustment after divorce. Divorce due to sexual infidelity is harder to accept, but couples who divorce because of personality differences seem to adjust better.”

Theme 3b.2: Conflicts during Marriage and Divorce Process (-)

Other than identifying adultery as an impediment to adjustment, Counsellors (1, 3, 4, 8, 9 & 11) also mentioned that conflicts, especially abuse, can also create animosity during a divorce and make subsequent adjustment more onerous. Such conflicts may spill into adversarial court proceedings making the entire divorce particularly protracted and unpleasant, which could in turn further impair the adjustment. Adversarial interactions may also be the result of a bitter contest over custody, maintenance, and visitation rights. Sometimes the legal process is not helpful in achieving an amicable divorce, and this is
usually true in contested and protracted proceedings where the couple has to challenge and find fault with each other every time they attend court proceedings.

As Counsellor Number 1 (Male, Aged 50) said:

“I think it depends on the stage of the divorce proceedings because if it is highly adversarial with legal complications and various issues are not agreeable by both parties or and if one party perceived that the other party is vindictive and unfair the outcome can be very exaggerated and emotional and this would raise tension and greater animosity.”

Summary

As discussed earlier, factors that impact a divorce also impinge on the adjustment process. Given the complexities of human nature and an epochal event such as a divorce, the adjustment process after divorce is seldom straightforward. One cannot expect that the recovery will proceed in an unhindered linear fashion. In fact, from the counsellors’ account of their clients’ experience, it would appear that most divorcees went through a roller-coaster journey of adjustment, fluctuating from moments of elation to pits of despondence.

The counsellors identified both positive and negative aspects of adjustment. How well the divorcees emerged from the divorce depends on a few crucial factors: infidelity and conflicts during marriage; personality; time; ability to move on; financial security; support network; and engaging in some purposeful activity. Overall, only two major factors, infidelity and conflicts, are considered impediments to post-divorce adjustment. The rest of the factors, if present, would greatly hasten the adjustment process. This is not surprising as the counsellors reported that their clients expressed a strong desire to start afresh after the initial pain and grief. Counsellors also observed that most of the divorcees, even for those who might be mired in self-pity, recovered over time and attained a sort of peaceful equilibrium in their lives without the ex-spouse.
Part F

Salvaging Marriages

The counsellors were asked if they thought that troubled marriages could be salvaged. In response, their views revolved around eight main themes as shown in Table 6.8.

Table 6.8

Section 4: Counsellors’ Views of Interventions That Could Salvage a Marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes &amp; Sub-themes</th>
<th>Counsellors</th>
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<td>4.1 Going for Pre-marriage Preparation</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.2 Being Committed to Marriage</td>
<td>X - X - - - - - - - - -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Managing Expectations/Differences and Relationships</td>
<td>X X X - - X - - - X - -</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.4 Taking Care of Basic Needs</td>
<td>X - - - - - - - - - X -</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.5 Paying Attention to Personal Appearance</td>
<td>- - - - - - X - X - - -</td>
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<td>4.6 Affirming Positive Traits</td>
<td>- - X - - - - - - - X -</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.7 Spending Time for Bonding with Spouse and Family</td>
<td>- - X X - - - - - X X -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8 Seeking Early Interventions</td>
<td>X X - X - - X X X - - X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5 2 5 3 1 1 2 1 2 3 4 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme 4.1: Going for Pre-marriage Preparation

Seven Counsellors (1, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11 & 12) believed that marriage preparation is crucial to equip people mentally for their new lives with their spouse. They commented...
that “Pre-marriage preparation” helps couples to understand each other’s expectations, and the different roles, duties and responsibilities that each would encounter in the matrimonial home. Counsellors (3 & 11) mentioned that during the pre-marriage counselling, potential issues and differences may surface and it would be helpful for couples to have the chance to address them before the wedding day. Such counselling sessions, they added if conducted early and before the wedding preparations, were seen as useful to create awareness and lessen the risk of the couples entering into marriage with an idealistic mindset or for unrealistic reasons. Counsellors (4 & 5) said that it is not uncommon for couples to rush into marriage for all sorts of reasons, such as to secure the allocation of an apartment under the public housing scheme. In land-scarce Singapore, young couples contemplating marriage often register early to purchase an affordable Housing & Development Board apartment as it takes months or sometimes even years before they are allocated one in their desired location. Both of them said that once a suitable apartment is accepted, the couple must show proof of marriage to the Board within three months of allocation – this may therefore involve a rush to get married. Alternatively, some couples they added may choose to register their marriages first in order to confirm their eligibility to purchase an HDB apartment, and then join the queue to wait for the allocation of a unit.

Another reason, Counsellor (11) mentioned that some couples opt for a hastier marriage because one of the parties is the eldest in the family – according to traditional Asian customs, particularly Chinese, the eldest sibling in the family usually marries first, before the younger ones follow suit..

Counsellors (1, 3 & 4) lamented that unfortunately, sometimes couples take pre-marital counselling sessions not as a reflection of the intending marriage but as a preparation for the wedding itself. Though this is seldom deliberate or even conscious, it is a troubling trend observed by some counsellors. Couples lost in love sometimes focus too
much on their wedding plans to make it unique and different from others such that they overlook the very reason for the counselling.

**Counsellor Number 4 (Male, Aged 46)** not only saw pre-marriage preparation as useful but also as a means of preventing people from entering it with the wrong mindset.

“I think marriage counselling could save marriages… Sometimes I wonder whether people marry for the wrong reasons. Or they go into marriage with a very unhealthy or unrealistic expectation of what a marriage is; or what is meant to be. With that, all the unrealistic expectations of what they can expect from their partner or demand from their partner. So I think a big, huge part of saving marriages would be the pre-marriage counselling…the preparation and really understanding what they are getting themselves into.”

**Theme 4.2: Being Committed to Marriage**

In addition to marriage preparation, two Counsellors (1 & 3) believed that a couple has to be willing to make a commitment to their marriage for it to work. They both observed with alarm that there are an increasing number of people who take a cavalier attitude towards marriage and who keep at the back of their minds an exit plan – divorce. Many couples they said forget that marriage is supposed to be a life-long commitment that requires two persons to work on it every day for the rest of their lives together. Few people can make that commitment and fewer still are prepared to work on it every day. Counsellor (1) saw this as an uphill task. Both advocated that it takes two hands to clap, it is also necessary for both parties to commit to work on their marriage. Unfortunately, not everyone comes to counselling with the intention of resolving their marital issues. The two counsellors both agreed that some clients would wilfully use the counselling session to announce that their marriage is over and may even subtly hint that the counsellor should help manage the emotional consequences of the break-up, which is to look after their partners. Hence the counsellors felt it was important for them to maintain clarity and focus on the aims of counselling during sessions with such clients.
Even if the couple may not be experiencing intimacy, they could jointly agree on operating with mutual acceptance and healthy functionality.

**Counsellor Number 1 (Male, Aged 50)** presented this possibility of functional co-existence.

“The thing to realize is that if the couple is functioning and they can tolerate never to be intimate, but live in a more pragmatic way with the agreement only to co-exist. And, they do it because it’s the right thing to do. It can be OK so long as they have their own interests.”

### Theme 4.3: Managing Expectations/Differences and Relationships

Pre-marriage preparations and commitments are not enough. Five Counsellors (1, 2, 3, 6 & 10) shared that there is a need to manage expectations during the marriage as well. First and foremost, Counsellor (2) said that couples should treat each other as unique individuals and not as stereotypical romantic figures. Often stereotyping and unrealistic expectations get in the way of the marriage succeeding – expectations change with time, and couples have to continually adjust, take stock and manage these dynamic expectations. For the marital adjustments to be effective, honest and non-threatening dialogue between the spouses is crucial, and counsellors suggested that changes be done incrementally.

**Counsellor Number 6 (Male, Aged 50)** believed it is especially important for couples to take stock periodically and manage their expectations of themselves and their marriage because of the intense pace of modern living.

“I think people need to be kind to themselves and to their marriages in a very highly stressed society. And sometimes, I think there’s a need to be kind to self and say, ‘Look, we need to look at what we are doing with our lives individually and with each other.’ Are we driving towards success, you know, the 24/7 lifestyle, it’s quite destructive to people. So I think many people don’t take that into consideration, they keep pushing, pushing. I am very struck by how couples lead their lives so intensely and their needs are not met and they blame each other. Take for example, they would say: ‘Why can’t you be more sensitive to me?’ We expect so much more and sometimes we take our expectation from the working world and dump it on to our spousal relationship as if it was in the same frame.”
Other than managing expectations, a couple must also continually work on their relationship to prevent their marriage from breaking down.

**Counsellor Number 6 (Male, Aged 50)** commented:

“...it's the preventive work, couples should be doing things to keep the marriage healthy and stay connected, that's what's missing. I think sometimes we only put in the effort when we realize there's a problem. And it might be too late.”

For **Counsellor Number 10 (Male, 50)**, working continually at a marriage is not so much preventive work but maintenance to keep it running. He recommended:

“...we have this assumption that when you get married then everything will be fine. But, marriage is like owning a car. You travelled a certain distance, you have to put in gas and regularly you have to service the car and therefore marriages must be regularly revisited....”

Managing the marriage relationship includes not only the expectations and aspirations, but also the conflicts which are part and parcel of marriage.

**Counsellor Number 2 (Male, Aged 59)** raised the issue of having the right attitude towards conflicts:

“... if only couples would be aware that conflicts tend to be a natural part of marital relationship and that they should not leave conflicts, differences or difficulties unattended.”

Counsellor (2) believed that as conflicts often arise from differences, one way to resolve them is to accept that the other party is different. Couples should acknowledge and if possible, leverage on the differences rather than fight them. In short, it is best to be more accepting and tolerant, to listen more and not be easily agitated. One other way to prevent conflicts from escalating is to avoid putting each other down because no marriage can survive constant “blood letting”, an unhealthy practice among some people to inflict emotional and psychological wounds on their spouses where they hurt most. Yet, conflicts often tend to escalate despite the best efforts by the couple to diffuse them. One reason could be the inappropriate approach which can sometimes exacerbate the issues because of a lack of awareness of the impact on the other party. The counsellors often advised couples
to be aware of each other’s personalities and the importance of managing their own temperaments; better still if they also learn conflict management.

**Counsellor Number 2 (Male, Aged 59):**

“In marital conflict, it is about acknowledging differences and coming to terms with differences. Very often couples have difficulties; they just can’t accept that they are different, so they try to change each other but with no success. But if they can, acknowledge they are different and learn to deal with that, then at least they can make good use of differences.”

One effective way, Counsellor (2) advised, of managing the marriage relationship is not to put each other down during a conflict. A couple needs to control themselves from saying hurtful things during conflicts. Some divorcees expressed regrets for reacting uncontrollably during the heat of an argument. In particular, conflicts can spin out of control when hurtful words are extended to the in-laws.

**Counsellor Number 3 (Female, Aged 50) said:**

“My clients would say with great remorse that they wish they could turn the clock back and be more mindful of their toxic words and not cross the line of being uncivilized in the heat of the moment. Especially hurtful things about in-laws. Once the conflicts involve extended family members, the situation will get more complicated, emotional and difficult. If they have managed the initial conflict better, it may not have gone out of hand. Once the family of origin has taken sides and animosities exchanged, it would be very difficult to save the marriage.”

Counsellor (3) added that finally, after each quarrel and conflict where hurtful words might have been said, a couple has to be able to forgive each other in order to salvage their marriage. Sincere apologies, contrition and the willingness to forgive each other help couples to move on after the altercations.

**Counsellor Number 3 (Female, Aged 50) said:**

“I think the counsellor can prepare the hurt party to accept the apology and the spouse who wants to apologise can also be coached on how to do it authentically and genuinely.
Theme 4.4: Taking Care of Basic Needs

Two Counsellors (1 & 11) commented that one way to maintain the marriage is to ensure that each other’s basic needs in the marriage are always being met. Such needs include financial stability, sexual fulfilment, basic home comforts and giving personal space.

Counsellor Number 11 (Male, Aged 40) said:

“One very basic need is to take care of the finances, and make sure that the family is stable and the family sufficiently provided for. This may sound very superficial but I feel that quite a fair bit of divorces could be triggered by the financial issues and this involve the rich too. They may have over-invested and the wife feels very stressed up. Or, they may have made heavy investments without consulting each other. It’s not just about provisions of the financial dollar but the whole notion about relationship surrounding the issue of finance. Some people tend to be very ambiguous or extremely irresponsible about finances.”

Counsellor (1) remarked that based on his 15 years of clinical experience while money matters get aired often and easily, such is not the same for sexual needs and aspirations. He said that in conservative Singapore society, couples rarely discuss their individual sex matters even in bed. Thus, he commented if one partner’s sexual needs are often not fulfilled, frictions in the marriage may arise without the other partner knowing the cause.

Theme 4.5: Paying Attention to Personal Appearance

Attention and care of oneself was also seen as an integral part of marriage. Two Counsellors (7 & 9) said that couples should strive to look good and not neglect their image and behaviour. When familiarity and sloppiness set in, the couples may take each other for granted.

Counsellor Number 9 (Female, Aged 33) shared accounts of how some of her clients felt that if they had taken more care of their appearance, or if they had been more sensitive to their spouses’ needs, their marriage could have been salvaged:
“A female client felt that she could have been more dressy and put on make-up and not look like an ‘aunty’ (local slang meaning a frumpy, middle-aged lady) in the supermarket; she said that, ‘maybe if I initiate more intimate gestures and maybe if I give all the sex that he demands and he might not stray’…or another client lamented that she should have given her husband more money…yet another husband felt that he should have given his wife more freedom. Most of these clients felt they should have given more.”

**Theme 4.6: Affirming Positive Traits**

Two Counsellors (3 & 11) said that one way to avoid an antagonistic relationship and to maintain the freshness in a marriage is to discover the positive traits in each other. Besides paying attention to oneself, both partners should be more attentive to each other to sustain the sparkle in the marriage.

As **Counsellor Number 3 (Female, Aged 50)** highlighted:

“Usually when couples come in for counselling, they are at odds with each other, blaming and critical of each other. They have difficulties seeing any positives in each other and their relationship …. So helping them to change their perceptions about each other and their relationship is important. They need to learn to listen to each other, reconnect, re-discover the positives in each other and in the relationship. They also need to believe that positive change is possible and they can do something about the situation. The important thing is we need to help them recall times in their marriage where there were many positives and good feelings about each other. To get them unstuck from the conflict and negative gridlock to a more positive time in their relationship. This helps them to see each other and their relationship in a different perspective. To examined their relationship and see the good times again and may be their marriage is worth saving, worth putting effort in.”

**Theme 4.7: Spending Time for Bonding with Spouse and Family**

Four Counsellors (3, 4, 10 & 11) commented that spending time with the family was also seen as important for saving marriages, and most counsellors reported that many clients regretted that they did not invest time in the family and their marriage. Besides spending time with family, couples also need to spend time together to maintain intimacy and love. Often, the need to provide materially for family takes away precious time from home especially in a fast-paced and stressed-filled urban society. Again, counsellors
advised that couples should seek solutions to their problems early, adding that counselling would be helpful before things deteriorate.

Work is a major cause of neglect of the family. The four Counsellors (3, 4, 10 & 11) shared some of the regrets expressed by their clients included the following:

“...I wish I don’t have to work so much so that I can stay at home more.”

“...If we had spent more time together and were not so preoccupied with children, work and other things... If we had spent regular time together, we would not have drifted apart.”

“...One of the things I hear a lot is regret from the way they reflected. some of my clients would see their part in the whole equation is the way they communicate, the way they perhaps have been too busy at work, the way they have neglected their wife, or not being sensitive to the wife’s needs; or the husband’s.”

**Theme 4.8: Seeking Early Interventions**

Seven Counsellors (1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9 & 12) believed that seeking early interventions in a troubled marriage is an effective way to save the marriage. However, while such intervention is critical, Counsellors (7 & 8) said that many fail to avail themselves of the service, and when they finally do so, it is already too late. According to some of the counsellors, the reasons many clients do not seek early intervention could include the following: denial and refusal to acknowledge that there is a problem; a lack of awareness of the impending disaster; an inability to link the signs and symptoms to the problems; and overwhelming paralysis when confronted with the problems. Counsellor (2) mentioned that there are also clients who are aware of the problems, and they recognise the signs as well as acknowledge the gravity, but they do not take any action and remain placidly inert, hoping that the problems will just go away.

**Counsellor Number 2 (Male, Aged 59)** highlighted that clients need to acknowledge and resolve issues in their marriage.

“Some couples are aware but they refused to acknowledge that they have a problem so no action is taken to raise issues and at least try to talk to each other about it.
Take for example, there’s one lady who shared with me. She claimed that they hardly ever quarrelled and she thought maybe they should have quarrelled more. Then at least they expressed their feelings and not allowed the marriage to drift apart. But, I guess people are afraid to raise problems...."

In serious cases, the couple can turn to counselling to manage their marital problems. The clients of Counsellors (4, 8 & 12), shared their experience on why divorcees should have sought professional help early to salvage their marriage before it is too late. Counsellors find themselves in a no-win situation when couples approach them even as the marriage has disintegrated and where no amount of professional help can salvage it. At best, the counselling may ameliorate the pain of separation. According to two Counsellors (8 & 9) some couples genuinely believe in the efficacy of counselling, but they are often reluctant to initiate it. And, Counsellor (9) who worked in a family service centre further reinforced her observation that even when the couple might have commenced with seeking counselling, they may not sustain the counselling process sufficiently to benefit from it. For the counselling to be effective couples must be willing to be helped, but there have been instances where clients encountered problems persuading the reluctant partner to attend counselling. In addition, there are couples who do not believe in seeking professional help, preferring to keep their matrimonial problems to themselves and not communicate their concerns to anyone. This is exasperating to counsellors who know from years of experience that if these couples had articulated their need for early intervention by professional counsellors, it would have made a difference to their happiness, their well-being and their marriage.

Counsellor Number 7 (Female, Aged 41) highlighted that counselling is helpful for people who are no longer able to communicate with their spouse.

““But for those who really feel that they have hit the wall with their spouses and things are difficult to communicate and instead of avoiding it... they may need to seek some help if they are not getting through with each other. Maybe they should seek some help at the early stage, at least one session.”"
In resolving problems in a marriage, the counsellors felt that it is critical for a couple to communicate with each other, and if that is difficult to initiate, they should not hesitate to seek help and intervention. The counsellors cited examples of clients who expressed regret for not having made the effort to do so when their marriage was in trouble. However, for reconciliation to succeed, the desire for communication must also be meaningful, genuine and sincere. Other than talking to each other, couples should communicate their problems with family members or close friends rather than keeping all the pain, suspicion and anxieties to themselves. Negative emotions when restrained and suppressed could lead to devastating results when unleashed with pent-up vehemence in the future. The counsellors recommended that there should be a healthy emotional release to restore balance in a person.

Counsellor Number 12 (Male, Aged 37) believed that for communication to be effective, it must be genuine and sincere.

“Well, firstly I encourage any couple I meet with to create some good honest communication. And, secondly both can take small steps with each other. Nothing drastic, just a small little effort and if you are willing to do those two things then you have a good chance. It won't be easy, but you'll have a good chance and it's worth it. That's what I encourage the spouses when I meet the couple.”

In addition to submitting themselves to counselling, couples have to be willing to change and work on the relationship. Recognising their weaknesses and taking steps to resolve them early is critical before such problems become unmanageable in the future.

Counsellor Number 1 (Male, Aged 50) believed in getting clients to resolve their weaknesses:

“If they don’t resolve their weakness, I mean, they can be somewhat suppressed and potentially eruptive. You see, if a person has a propensity to have affair and if it’s not dealt with, it will predispose itself in the future. It can be subdued for a while but there’s still a propensity for that to be activated – that is a pattern.”
Summary

Study 3 comprised an exploration of the divorce experience from the perspectives of a professional group of counsellors. The counsellors reflected on how their divorced clients constructed meaning and understanding of the reasons for divorce; the negative and positive impact they faced; and the post-divorce adjustment. This permitted a comparison of the interview data with the 19 divorcees presented in Study 2. The counsellors also shared their clients’ experience of the positive and negative outcomes of divorce and factors that were useful in their post-divorce adjustment.

Fundamentally, the immediate impact of divorce on divorcees is the manifestation of negative emotions of shock, pain, grief, loss, denial, anger, uncertainty and insecurity. These initial negative feelings are compounded by the longer-term impact on physical and mental health, parenthood challenges and financial problems. However, the counsellors also agreed that there are positive outcomes after divorce, and the most immediately felt is the sense of enormous relief from pain, distress, “captivity” and tension. Concomitant with this feeling of relief is the sense of freedom experienced by many divorcees. The freedom to choose, to move on and to have a new identity was something for which many divorcees were grateful after a loveless marriage. Another positive impact is the new-found sense of empowerment felt by the divorcees. They were able to raise their children without interference from the ex-spouse, and they could have a new identity without their existence being predicated by another person.

The counsellors discussed their clients’ experience of adjustment post-divorce, highlighting two main impediments to adjustment: the presence of infidelity and conflicts during marriage. Altogether, ten major themes and six sub-themes were identified as positive factors in adjustment. Finally the counsellors also identified eight main themes on how troubled marriages could be salvaged. Of the eight suggestions they cited, they felt
that the most important ones emphasised marriage as a partnership of equals such as, pre-marriage preparation; commitment to marriage; managing expectations and relationships; and seeking early interventions. The counsellors’ advice has policy implications on societies experiencing an upward trend in divorce rate and this will be further discussed in Chapter 7.
CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION AND INTEGRATION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS ACROSS THE THREE STUDIES

7.1 Overview of the Chapter

This research aimed at providing new information on the experience of divorce in Singapore. In particular, it explored the nature of positive and negative outcomes from divorce. A detailed investigation has been conducted on the reasons for divorce; identification of the factors and indicators of a troubled marriage; and more importantly, clarification of factors that contributed to positive growth outcomes after a divorce. The present research encompassed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in three related studies, and is the first in-depth study in Singapore on post-divorce adjustment and growth.

Prior to this research, the only study covering post-divorce adjustment and growth in Singapore was done in 1979 by the Applied Research Corporation for the then Ministry of Social Affairs. That study relied in part on data obtained from the High Court where actual divorce cases were filed. In the 30 years since, the social and economic scene in Singapore has undergone tremendous change. The present research built on the 1979 study and broke new ground with views obtained not only from divorcees themselves but also from in-depth interviews with counsellors.

In this chapter, the research questions which guided the present research are discussed in relation to findings from all three studies. However, research question 6 required comparison between the views of counsellors and divorcees. Therefore, the
similarities and differences are discussed where relevant across the remaining six questions. The theoretical and methodological implications of the data are also considered and suggestions made for future research directions. The chapter concludes with recommendations on possible applications of the findings in a counselling setting.

7.2: Research Question 1: What are the perceived main reasons for divorce?

The two methodologies employed in the present research allowed for comparison of reasons provided for divorce under different research conditions. In Study 1, information was gathered via a structured questionnaire in which the divorcees selected from a list of factors identified by other studies and from the clinical experience of the researcher. In contrast, Studies 2 and 3, involved the semi-structured interviews, which gave participants the opportunity to draw upon their own experiences and to respond freely to the interview questions.

7.2.1: Predisposing Divorce Factors – Reasons for Divorce

Eight predisposing themes contributing to divorce were identified from the narratives of the 19 divorcees in Study 2, whereas 19 indicators of marital instability were recognised in Study 1. In Study 3, nine themes were revealed but the counsellors were not able to differentiate whether they were predisposing or precipitating factors. The five strongest and most frequently mentioned reasons across the three studies were “communication issues”, “financial issues”, “personality differences and incompatibility”, “abusive behaviour” and “lack of passionate love and growing apart.” There were significant overlaps across the three studies and some interesting parallels were identified. Table 7.1 presents the number of people who highlighted these five factors across the three studies.
Table 7.1

Predisposing Factors for Divorce Common in the Three Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes, Sub-themes and Indicators</th>
<th>Quantitative Study 1 (134 Respondents)</th>
<th>Qualitative Study 2 (19 Participants)</th>
<th>Qualitative Study 3 (12 Counsellors)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men (n=45)</td>
<td>Women (n=89)</td>
<td>Men (n=5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Issues</td>
<td>22 (49%)</td>
<td>49 (55%)</td>
<td>3 (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Issues</td>
<td>11 (24%)</td>
<td>33 (37%)</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality Differences and Incompatibility</td>
<td>23 (51%)</td>
<td>45 (51%)</td>
<td>1 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusive Behaviours</td>
<td>10 (22%)</td>
<td>44 (49%)</td>
<td>3 (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Passionate Love and Growing Apart</td>
<td>25 (56%)</td>
<td>34 (38%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In all three studies, communication issues; personality differences and incompatibility; as well as abusive behaviour emerged as key areas signalling a marriage in distress (see Table 7.1). These data collected are consistent with that of a longitudinal study conducted in the United States by Amato & Previti (2003). However, in Singapore, two other predisposing factors for divorce were cited: financial issues and a lack of passionate love and growing apart. Nine participants in Study 2 and 44 respondents in Study 1 stressed that money or the lack of it undermined marriages and gave rise to matrimonial conflict, distrust and erosion of respect. Interestingly, the men in Study 2 did not comment on the lack of passionate love and growing apart. Perhaps to the men caught in the midst of marital distress such emotional feelings were not articulated as they were no longer significant. However, for the women, these emotional feelings remained as underlying unresolved marital issues.
In Study 1, the most common indicators that emerged were nagging/complaining, frequent quarrels, and a lack of communication. In Study 2, similar indicators were grouped under the major theme of communication issues. Communication breakdown was in fact the biggest marital problem identified among both men and women in all three studies. However, the communication issue was perceived somewhat differently by the men and women.

It was noted in Study 1 that the men often viewed their wives as nagging and this could be because women seemed more concerned about discussing marital issues, as revealed in Study 2. Nagging, which can be seen as an expression of frustration and even resentment; is also an attempt to draw attention to perceived needs that have been unmet. In Study 1, the respondents’ memories might have been triggered by the listing of “nagging and complaining” among the pre-coded reasons in the questionnaire. However, the participants in Study 2 were not asked specifically about this issue in the open-ended interviews. Hence, it is conceivable that for the majority of these participants, their memories of nagging and complaining might have been subsumed by bigger issues which became the predisposing and precipitating factors having a more direct bearing on the marital breakdown. Eileen, for example, confessed that she only nagged at her husband out of utter frustration and desperation; and she felt that ultimately it was his inability to support her in the conflict with his mother that broke the marriage. It is also possible that in acrimonious break-ups some divorcees may have glossed over or been unaware of their own role in nagging and complaining.

Another possible explanation for the greater incidence of nagging reported by the men in Study 1 could be that they identified the women’s tendency to keep pushing for more communication to resolve issues in marriage as nagging if they did not wish to engage in such discussion. This could in turn, lead the men to withdraw from
communication altogether as reported by several female and some male participants in Study 2, where such withdrawal has been grouped under the sub-theme “communication impasses”. Examples given by divorcees in Study 2 reflected a complete withdrawal or a futile attempt at interaction which instead led to conflict and an “absence of communication”.

In Study 3, four (33%) of the counsellors pointed out that over time, communication issues could contribute significantly to marital dissolution. Interestingly, while nine (47%) of the divorcees in Study 2 spoke about various communication issues they had encountered in their marriages, only two of them specifically identified nagging/complaining as a predominant issue compared to 45 out of the 136 respondents in Study 1. For example, in Study 2, Jenny said her Japanese husband’s frequent complaining about living in Singapore eventually drove her to file for divorce. Instead, the divorcees in Study 2 focused more on the lack of openness and honesty in the marriage and an absence of communication altogether, leading to communication impasses. Four counsellors in Study 3 postulated that communication impasses and absence could aggravate emotional distancing and lead to a whole host of relational issues such as marital discord, emotional insecurity, withdrawal and abandonment, resulting in further deterioration in marital satisfaction. This was evident for the nine divorcees in Study 2 for whom communication issues became predisposing and even precipitating factors.

The findings on communication issues are consistent with studies by Burns (1984) and Eells & O’Flaherty (1996), conducted in Australia and the United States respectively. Both studies identified communication issues as the most common reason given by both men and women for the breakdown of their marriages. Kitson (1992) also found in the United States that people with a higher level of education and social status were more likely to complain of a “lack of communication and understanding” (page 135).
Incompatibility issues were raised by five participants in Study 2 and four counsellors in Study 3 while half the respondents in the quantitative survey selected “personality difference” as a reason for their divorce. These two predisposing themes of “communication” and “incompatibility” are also consistent with the work of Wolcott & Hughes (1999) conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. In general, they believed that the perception of communication problems as the main reason for marriage breakdown could be an attempt to articulate an array of marital issues connected with emotional erosion in the relationship, such as not being understood; the feeling that needs are not met; a loss of affection and companionship; and feeling lonely and unappreciated. Such issues when not communicated can bring about deeper emotional and psychological problems. Therefore, successful mastering of communication, problem solving and conflict resolution skills allows for marital negotiation of expectations, roles and tasks. It can also allow for competencies in understanding of emotional and relational needs between both parties and ultimately strengthening marriage and preventing marital breakdown.

The present research established that, while a range of reasons could be given as the specific trigger for divorce, the discordant seeds had usually been sown long before any trigger reason was even identified. Along the way leading to the break-up, other marital problems would have surfaced, and contributed to a final tipping point. The 1979 Ministry of Social Affairs study also concluded that divorce did not happen suddenly but that a gradual deterioration of the relationship preceded the eventual resolve that the marriage was no longer tenable. However, the 1979 report did not identify any precipitating factors that finally led to one party filing for divorce.

The present three studies support the view that the act of marriage dissolution is a dynamic process, and it is often not possible to pinpoint any single reason for divorce.
This is clearly evident from the data obtained in Study 1, where respondents nominated what they saw as the main reason leading to the divorce and provided an event to illustrate this factor. The respondents’ free responses revealed common conclusions such as adultery (24%); relationship problems (14%); communication issues (13%); desertion (11%); and abuse (7%). Yet, the counsellors in Study 3 could not identify any precipitating reasons for divorce, although they mentioned that desertion and adultery were often important trigger points. This is supported by data from Study 2, which revealed four key precipitating reasons: desertion, adultery, spousal abuse, and an accumulation of factors.

This compilation of reasons for divorce as a constellation of multiple, sometimes complex and often dynamic reasons, is consistent with earlier models of divorce. Wolcott & Hughes (1999) synthesised the multifaceted reasons for divorce into three categories: (a) affective reasons comprising communication issues, incompatibility and adultery; (b) abusive behaviour including physical violence, emotional, sexual and verbal abuse, and substance abuse; and, (c) external pressure that includes financial problems, family and work interference, and health. The factors identified in this research can similarly be grouped under Walcott’s and Hughes’ three categories. The five common and overlapping themes are not independent constructs given that many responses from the interviews in Study 2 were related to a number of different themes. For example, in Eileen’s account although her relationship with her mother-in-law was a predisposing factor in her divorce (family issue), at the same time, it was also evident that the breakdown in communication between her husband and her had exacerbated the conflict (communication issue). This response was also categorised under “lack of passionate love” as, from the wife’s perspective, the husband seemed not to love her enough to resolve the conflict to her satisfaction. Thus, while certain themes were common, divorcees produced their own unique combinations of causes and reasons testifying to the dynamic process of divorce.
In addition to the five most prominent factors, most of the other factors identified in Study 1 were cited directly or indirectly in the two qualitative studies. While the categorisation differed somewhat because terms used across the two research methodologies differed, the underlying factors (or reasons for divorce) were essentially the same. Less common indicators such as assault, jealousy and gambling/alcoholism were cited in the quantitative survey by less than 20%, also surfaced in the qualitative studies.

It is also evident that predisposing divorce factors such as constant nagging and verbal, physical and sexual abuse, tended to be gender-specific. For example, in Study 1, male divorcees cited constant nagging and complaining as predisposing factors for divorce whereas female divorcees reported abuse in all forms and non-truthful communication as significant factors affecting their marriages. In fact, abuse in its various forms was reported more by women than men in Study 2, underlying its gender-specificity. Among the men interviewed in Study 2, only Rajiv and Mahesh reported abuse, and this was in the context of their physical abuse of their wives. Although their ex-wives’ perspectives on such abuse could not be explored, it is likely that they had bearing on these women’s decisions to leave their husbands. When reflecting upon their divorce, both Mahesh and Rajiv raised the possibility that their spousal abuse could have been related to their social and cultural conditioning as Indian men. None of the men in Study 2 were themselves victims of physical or sexual abuse but interestingly, Gopal commented that he experienced verbal abuse from his emotional wife. On the other hand, Queenie, Susan, Katherine and Dalina all said they were victims of physical and verbal abuse, while Queenie was also subjected to sexual abuse. Abuse was in fact reported by about a third of female respondents, participants and counsellors across the three studies.
7.2.2: Participants’ and Counsellors’ Understanding of Reasons for Divorce

The divorcees interviewed in Study 2 and the counsellors interviewed in Study 3 reported broadly similar reasons for divorce. However, some reasons cited by the divorcees were not identified by the counsellors. These included (a) family issues; (b) weak foundation in love; (c) issues on spending time together; (d) spouse’s mental illness; and (e) religious differences. Conversely, some reasons identified by the counsellors were not mentioned by the participants. These reasons included conflicts over parenting style, lack of marital satisfaction, and sexual-related problems. These differences might have arisen because the counsellors were drawing inferences based on their experience with their clients. Thus, they might have been inclined towards making generalisations and identifying the more commonly-cited reasons given for divorce. Indeed, some of the reasons cited by the participants but not the counsellors were experienced by only one or two of the participants (e.g., religious difference, coping with the spouse’s mental illness, and disagreement over which country to live in).

A second factor highlighting the differences between participants’ and counsellors’ perceptions was that not every couple encountering marital problems would seek professional external interventions; and those who did probably sought out the counsellors only after their problems had built up over time. Underlying issues that had triggered other problems in the marriage (e.g., the husband being less successful in his career than the wife) might not have been mentioned to counsellors by their clients as these could have been buried under other more recent or pressing issues that carried a greater emotional charge for the client.

A third reason for the difference could be that participants and counsellors would likely have perceived some of the reasons for divorce from a different perspective and used different terms to describe them. For example, while participants cited ‘incompatibility’,
the counsellors recognised it as ‘conflict-based’ reasons for divorce. Significantly, counsellors also believed that it is not a couple’s differences but their inability to manage and resolve these differences that resulted in a divorce. Moreover, the counsellors were possibly more likely to mention these reconciliation factors to repair marriages as they offer mediation and counselling services to their clients. Another example of the differences in perceptions between counsellors and divorcees is the subject of abuse. The counsellors viewed abuse analytically as triggered by conflict, while some participants characterised marital abuse as rooted in cultural values that relegate women to a lower social status deserving of less respect than men. However, as these problems are symptomatic of other issues in the marriage, the participants might have chosen to identify these generically. Thus, they used an all-encompassing term “incompatibility” to explain the various manifestations of the problem such as, different goals, personality mismatch and having nothing in common, rather than as conflicts as identified by the counsellors in Study 3.

The disparity in the cited reasons for divorce could also have arisen because the divorcees are laypersons and less likely to use clinical terms for referring to specific reasons for divorce. The counsellors, on the other hand, were more inclined towards supporting their clients to specify the reasons behind the assumed incompatibility. It is in their nature of work to be objective, analytical and precise.

Although there are differences in the divorcees’ and counsellors’ perspectives, combining their views gives a more complete picture of the causes of divorce. It appears that these themes work in linear progression, starting with predisposing reasons for marital conflicts, then leading to relational problems and finally, triggering a decision to dissolve the marriage. It is difficult, however, to accurately distinguish which one of these factors the primary contributor to the formal reasons given for divorce. Although earlier research
has explored the process of estrangement that precedes the formal step to file for divorce (e.g., Kitson, 1992), the findings in the thematic analysis of Study 2 suggest that marital dissatisfaction can progress in a series of events or stages that finally culminates in a decision to file for divorce. If there is no precipitating event, the marital relationship might become progressively more troubled, morphing into a feeling of alienation, with both parties sensing that the marriage is faltering, if not failing.

7.2.3: Precipitating Factors – Triggers for Divorce

Exploration of the precipitating factors for divorce provides important understanding of the perceived reasons for divorce, and while such factors could not be easily differentiated from predisposing factors in Study 1 and 3, four precipitating themes surfaced in Study 2. Not surprisingly, these precipitating reasons for divorce were also suggested directly or indirectly as indicators in Study 1 or predisposing factors in Study 2. This overlap again suggests that, given the subjectivity of the recollection process, especially after a considerable lapse of time, there is no easy way to pinpoint specific or particular reasons and indicators that trigger divorce. This is not surprising given that most divorcees had gone through a traumatic experience of separation over a long period of time from someone with whom they hitherto had the intention of spending the rest of their lives together. They cannot, therefore, be expected to be precise in identifying what actually pushed them to make the crucial life-changing decision. The narratives of several participants in Study 2 showed that the actual factor that precipitated divorce was likely to be a product of an extended process and not confined to a single episode. Even after the divorce had been finalised, it was apparently still not easy for divorcees to distinguish between predisposing factors and precipitating factors. Many divorcees were simply relieved that the divorce was over and tended to consider such categorisation as unnecessary and irrelevant.
It is, however, necessary to highlight again the distinction between the precipitating factors that triggered divorce, as documented in this study, and the legally-accepted reasons for divorce under the Women’s Charter and the Administration of Muslim Law Act summarised in Chapter 1. It has been noted in this research that the official reasons given do not always reflect the actual reasons for divorce. In Study 1 many respondents identified the factors that led to divorce as (a) personality differences (51%); (b) lack of communication (53%); (c) loss of trust (47%); (d) loss of love (44%); and, (e) frequent quarrels (55%). These reasons are quite different from those cited in the actual divorce proceedings. Frequent quarrels, communication problems, and loss of love and trust are not legally acceptable grounds for divorce. Although adultery is legally acceptable, divorce petitioners prefer to avoid going through the onerous process of having to prove it in court when they can instead fall back on meeting the legal requirements by using prolonged separation or citing unreasonable spousal behaviour. It was also suggested in the Singapore (1979) study that the reason could be the “stronger stigma to adultery hence causing the couples to prefer other grounds for divorce” (page 27). Citing unreasonable behaviour also has the further advantage of appearing to absolve the petitioner of any blame in the break-up of the marriage.

Desertion was identified in both the quantitative and qualitative studies as a precipitating factor. Interestingly, this forms only 1.6% of the legal reasons for divorce granted under the Women’s Charter in the Singapore 2006 statistics. Adultery constitutes only about 2.1% of the reasons for divorce under the Charter. However, it was cited by 24% of the respondents (9 men & 23 women) in Study 1, not as a precipitating factor but as one of the indicators that led to divorce. Although adultery has often been identified in past studies as the main cause of divorce, few divorcees in Study 1 or 2 sought to end their
marriage on this ground, obviously because of the burden of proof required for the civil court.

Surprisingly, only two participants in Study 2 discussed the negative impact of marital conflict on their children. One of them faced the threat of child suicide as a result of the marital conflict while the other was distressed by the quarrels between his children and their stepmother, who was then his wife. Significantly, only Oscar in Study 2 cited directly that their children were a reason for divorce. The findings of Study 1 indicated that 70% of the respondents had at least one child at the time of the divorce, with 38% having two children or more. It would appear that having children in the family did not prevent divorce, nor was it a deterrent. Perhaps further study is necessary to fathom the children’s role in the divorce dynamics. Study 2 did not show conclusively if the presence of children helped or hindered marriage break-up or post-divorce recovery. However, two divorcees in Study 2 shared that the presence of young children played a crucial external factor that affected positive adjustment, while another three divorcees expressed post-divorce guilt and fears over the possibility of their children encountering prejudice from school-mates over their parents’ divorce. Walters-Chapman, Price & Serovich (1995) examined the relationship between guilt and adjustment after divorce among men and women in the United States and it was postulated that divorced persons who are parents of young children experienced high levels of guilt and lower levels of post-divorce adjustment.

It is noted that none of the participants in Study 2 chose divorce as a convenient way to end the marriage; their decision usually came only after prolonged attempts had been made to endure the situation, to improve the marriage, or to reach reconciliation. Adultery, which was reported by a third of the participants, was a common reason given for their decision to divorce. A number of the participants made the decision upon
discovery of infidelity, while the more long-suffering participants gave their spouses repeated opportunities to repent until they reached their limit of tolerance. Abuse, verbal, physical and sexual, was yet another commonly cited trigger for divorce reported by a third of the participants. Even so, the participants revealed that the decision for their divorce was more deeply rooted than merely being abused, adding that the predisposing factors which contributed to their decision had occurred over a period of time.

From the in-depth analysis of themes in Study 2, it would appear that one or more predisposing factors had eroded the quality of the marriage to such an extent that the decision to divorce was made. Indeed, all it needed was an aggravating factor to trigger the couple to take the first concrete step to initiate divorce. Such a tipping point could be a single precipitating event, such as the sudden physical violence in Dalina’s and Katherine’s case or it could even be attributed to an inconsequential or innocuous remark as in the case of Nancy which happened over a meal with her husband, and for Felicia, it was during a conversation where she raised the rhetorical question: “Are you wanting a divorce?” It was at such a breaking point that the desire to end the marriage overcame the fear of stepping out of it, and which overrode all the internal and external objections against divorce.

Nearly half of the participants in Study 2 decided on divorce on the realisation that their marriage had failed beyond salvation. In some cases, the participants sought support from family, friends and even professional counsellors before confirming their decision. In other cases, some participants struggled on alone, even going against the counsel of family and relatives to stay in the marriage. Given all these different scenarios, it would seem that any intervention to save the marriage should therefore be targeted at resolving the predisposing factors, before the situation comes to a head. A few participants mentioned that once they had made up their mind to file for divorce, it was a point of no return.
7.3: Research Question 2: How do divorcees adjust after a divorce in Singapore?

Data obtained from Study 1 showed that on average, both men and women took 30.8 months from their decision to divorce to the actual filing for divorce. The long duration was not unexpected because it is well established that divorce is a traumatic event not entered into lightly (Chiriboga, 1982; Menaghan & Lieberman, 1986; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Gullo, 1992).

It has been observed that divorcees experience negative reactions immediately before and after filing for divorce. These reactions can persist from six months to two years. Clinically, the experience of most divorcees would qualify as an “adjustment disorder” as outlined in the DSM IV - TR (see Chapter 2, page 49). The quantitative survey provided retrospective snapshots of respondents’ adjustment at three points – upon taking the action to file for divorce; within six months after divorce; and a further six months or longer after that. The data from Study 1 demonstrate a clear pattern across these time points, with all the negative reactions at the highest at the time of filing for divorce, lower in the first six months after divorce and lower still after another six months. In addition, while the gap between men and women decreased over time in negative thoughts, feelings and behaviour, the data revealed a gender difference in that the women scored significantly higher than the men in negative reactions.

Generally, a sense of increased relief, peace and freedom over time was also evident in the interviews in Study 2 for nine out of the 19 participants. Eight out of twelve counsellors also reported that their clients felt a sense of relief post-divorce. Given the evidence from Study 1, 2 and 3, it would appear that the distress diminishes over time for most people. This aligns with findings reported in studies conducted in other countries (e.g., Kelly, 1980; Ahrons, 1981; Hetherington, 1982; Amato, 2000), all of which indicated that adjustment following divorce was a time-dependent process.
Interview data from Study 2 indicated that the vast majority of participants reported that they were able to feel “Very Well-Adjusted” and/or “Well-Adjusted” after divorce and only four fell into the “Still Trying to Adjust” category following the divorce. Although time is a critical factor in the process of adjustment, it does not appear to be the sole determinant of divorce adjustment. Dalina, for example, seemed to buck the trend as she reported that she was still trying to adjust even nine years after divorce. Friedman (2002) expounded that an individual’s ability to adjust with significant resourcefulness in the face of extreme and daily challenge helps in building resilience and adjustment. However, Dalina said that she was still longing for her ex-husband’s love and care and was neither able to tap on her internal and external resources, nor recognize new possibilities or paths (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). This is consistent with an observation made by Johnson & Campbell (1988) that holding on to an idealised view of one’s former partner retards one’s adjustment and positive growth.

Dalina’s continuing manifestation of chronic symptoms of “adjustment disorder”, long after her divorce is in line with similar observations in studies undertaken by different researchers (e.g., Pett, 1982; Pett & Vaughan-Cole, 1986; Thabes, 1997). These studies have found that divorcees have great difficulties in social adjustment, and that the ability to cope and adjust depends not so much on time (though time is undoubtedly a necessary factor in the healing process) but on the emotional and psychological make-up of the person. In effect, how resilient a person is determines in large measure the success of adjustment post-divorce.

In Study 3, only three of the 12 counsellors felt able to rate the post-divorce adjustment of their clients, as generally the clients had stopped their counselling sessions following their decision to divorce. One counsellor mentioned that the adjustment process seemed to take an average of two years while the other two said their clients took up to
three to four years. This observation aligns with studies by Amato (2000) and Booth & Amato (1991) who found that on the average, divorcees take two years before they regain equilibrium because sufficient time is required to detach oneself from one’s ex-spouse and for one to work towards establishing a stable new lifestyle. Interestingly, however, 59% of the respondents in Study 1 indicated that they experienced positive adjustment within the first 12 months compared with 29% who reported adjustment only after the first 12 months. It can be concluded that although some research studies have established a possible time frame of two years to recover post-divorce, the time taken for post-divorce adjustment is highly variable from individual to individual.

Other than the effect of time, differences in adjustment level between men and women were also identified in this research. Other studies undertaken by Thabes (1997), Berman & Turk (1981), Berman (1985) and Williams & Byrant (2006) all indicate that in general women have a greater tendency to appraise a divorce negatively and are likely to suffer more following a divorce. This is perhaps more evident in Singapore than in some Western countries as there is still considerable stigma attached to divorce, especially for women. Hence, female divorcees in Singapore might perceive themselves as “unfortunate” and “constituting an unhealthy trend” (Wong, Yeoh, Graham & Teo, 2004).

In Study 2, financial issues emerged as major adjustment difficulty and this concern was raised by several participants. Four women and one man found themselves having to tackle serious financial issues after divorce. Rajiv, Chitra, Anna and Nancy, for example, had to shoulder their financial burdens alone. Anna and Jenny, also suffered financial losses when they had to wind up the businesses they had co-owned with their former husbands. Unless the division of assets in the business is covered in the divorce settlement, the winding up of a joint business has to be treated like any other legal matter among shareholders or partners, adding to the emotional and financial strain that divorced
couples have to shoulder. In a sense, being gainfully employed and not in a business partnership with one’s spouse might help to buffer the feeling of financial helplessness post-divorce.

In Singapore, given the high female labour participation rate (Ministry of Manpower, 2007), many married couples are accustomed to living on two incomes and shared household expenses. Rajiv, for example, encountered financial stress without his wife’s financial contribution after their divorce, and was left to struggle alone on his modest pastor’s salary. In contrast, Felicia actually emerged better off financially as she was no longer responsible for her husband’s debts. Some of the participants’ ex-spouses were not able to provide the mandated monthly maintenance payments resulting in both male and female divorcees being saddled with financial woes and worries. Thus, the termination of marriage impelled some divorcees such as Anna and Nancy to become the sole bread-winners and take on the full responsibility for maintaining their dependent children.

Besides having a high female labour participation rate, Singapore is also a small, compact and highly urbanised city-state with almost full employment. Therefore, there is a great likelihood that locals are raised, live and work all their lives in the same city and perhaps even in the same neighbourhood. As a result, divorcees do not have the refuge of anonymity or the opportunity to uproot themselves to start a new life in a new city, unlike divorcees who live in geographically larger countries with many cities. It is thus not easy in Singapore to escape from one’s social circle or to start a new one after divorce. Furthermore, as the society is still a relatively conservative one with Asian values, divorcees here may still feel the social stigma of divorce (Chui & Kwan, 1997). Social disapproval can also be hurtful in some ultra-conservative communities where divorcees face the risk of ostracism; and this is evident in the thematic analysis from Study 2. For
instance, Chitra, who not only had to endure the pain of divorce but also the overt stigmatisation of her conservative Indian society. Wong & Kuo (1983) postulated that a situation like this may be due to the relative conservative nature of the Indian community characterised by the practice of arranged marriage and the strong social stigma of divorce, especially for women. In Dalina’s case she withdrew from social life to avoid criticism from colleagues and ostracism by her relatives, although these fears might not have been proven in reality.

In Study 1, women consistently scored higher than men across the range of negative emotions, especially feelings of fear, grief, worry and anxiety immediately after filing for divorce. However, the emotions experienced by the divorcees were not static and they improved over time. Schonbeck (2006) suggested that symptoms of adjustment disorder can be expected to disappear within six months of the removal of the stressors or pressure-causing event. This was similarly observed in the quantitative survey as enumerated earlier. However, not all respondents recovered, as a small portion reported that they were still unable to adjust in these areas after six months. Most commonly, feelings of sadness lingered, a feeling identified by one in four respondents six months after divorce. While sadness was the most common feeling among the women, a substantial number of men also continued to experience sadness six months or longer after divorce. Interestingly, the earlier study conducted on non-Muslim divorce in Singapore also showed that both men and women reported feeling sad, with female divorcees expressing stronger feelings when the final court decision was first heard (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1979).

In Study 2, there appears to be a contradiction in participants’ responses when it came to adjustment. While most concurred that they had adjusted well after the divorce, some shared that they continued to harbour feelings of regret and sadness. Such mixed feelings are understandably inevitable. Regardless of how successful the participants might
have adjusted to the divorce, for some, divorce was still a failed marriage. Nancy, for instance, held the view that ultimately, there is no positive outcome from a divorce. Similarly, Iris continued to experience sadness although she was relieved that she got everything she wanted from the divorce. Although Penny and Helen adjusted very well, certain things still triggered sadness and thoughts of their ex-husbands, such as an empty bed, comparison of new partners with the ex-spouse and the end of a childhood love relationship. Stress can also occur when there is a gap between what is actually happening and what a divorcee feels capable of managing. This was experienced by Dalina and Katherine in the Study 2. Dalina was worried about having to bring up her children single-handedly as they were still young; and Katherine felt stressed by her new roles of sole bread-winner and decision-maker in the family.

Interestingly, in various other studies (e.g., Veevers, 1991; Pettit & Boom, 1984; Salts, 1989), initiators of divorce perceived more benefits following divorce and were thus less likely to be distressed. In Study 2, 10 women and two men who initiated the divorce had grown apart emotionally from their spouses prior to filing for divorce and after divorce they were able to make positive adjustments. Anna, Helen and Katherine were happy with the legal process because they had full custody of their children and their spouses only requested visitation rights. Johnston & Campbell (1999) and Munoz-Equileta (2007) argued that having a low attachment to one’s ex-partner is a “stren” response to divorce. Dalina and Felicia who though initiated their divorce shared that they were still trying to adjust. Both of them are still emotionally attached to their ex-spouse, and therefore lacked this “stren” response to divorce.

Men and women also differed in the way they coped with their divorce. According to Horwitz & Davies (1994), men are more likely to exhibit externalizing behavioural expressions of distress such as alcohol abuse, whereas women are more likely to internalise
emotional distress; hence, women are at a higher risk of developing depression. Findings in the quantitative study support such a theory, with 36% of the men reporting that they abused alcohol and 33%, cigarettes, in the initial period of divorce while the corresponding figures for the female respondents were 19% and 13% respectively. The women had a higher rate of abusing medication instead, with 11% of them reporting it compared to 2% of the men. However, these results can only be reliably considered for the first six months as the survey questionnaire did not indicate the need to provide information for the three time periods.

As in Study 1, the pattern of coping with divorce in Study 2 and Study 3 is generally gender specific with women suffering from a more serious range of psychological ailments than the men. The counsellors in Study 3 observed that women took medication and indulged in various distractions to avoid emotional and physical pain. The counsellors also reported that their clients had sleeping and eating problems as well as difficulties concentrating while some others experienced emotional distress. Study 2 revealed little evidence of substance abuse; Mahesh, who smoked, drank and gambled even before he was married becoming an even heavier smoker and drinker immediately after his divorce. However, he stopped the substance abuse soon after he remarried. In contrast Queenie and Susan who were both on medication for depression improved so much post-divorce that they stopped their prescribed anti-depressant medication.

From the findings of this research, it appears that, in concert with past research in other countries, most divorcees in Singapore are also able to adjust well post-divorce. This is dependent on the type of active coping strategies they possess (Wild & Paivio, 2003), and their personal qualities, such as resilience, self-esteem and self-mastery (Abraido-Lanza, Guier, & Colon, 1998). Among the 136 respondents of Study 1, there was evidence of positive adjustments among respondents who did not view divorce as a
personal failure, who had supportive peers, and who possessed positive personality factors. Some key positive outcomes reported by respondents post-divorce included (a) feeling happier (64%); (b) gaining more independence (61%); (c) having more peace and quiet (57%); and having a more positive outlook toward life (53%). This supports the view that positive adjustment is related to how well the divorcée is able to reframe the divorce as a constructive experience.

A similar finding was evident in the thematic analysis of Study 2, where participants stated that having a positive outlook, practising self-reflection and having support from family and friends were factors that contributed to their positive adjustment. Conversely, viewing divorce as a personal failure resulted in negative adjustment to their divorce. Among the counsellors, having a supportive network was most widely cited as a favourable factor in adjustment, although personal characteristics such as resilience and the ability to let go and start afresh also played a part. In addition, environmental characteristics such as social support are commonly studied in relation to personal growth, with the majority of studies reporting a positive relationship between the two (e.g., Siegel, Schrimshaw & Pretter, 2005). These positive adjustment strategies also appear to serve as inner resources that facilitate growth. The findings of the present research and the adjustment strategies discussed so far have direct relevance to the post-divorce growth of divorcees in Singapore, and such growth is discussed further in the section covering findings related to Research Question 4.
7.4: Research Question 3: What are the positive and negative post-divorce outcomes experienced by divorcees in Singapore?

The primary focus of this research question was to explore how divorce impacted on the Singapore divorcees and what were the positive and negative post-divorce outcomes.

7.4.1: Negative Outcomes Post-divorce

Marital disruption is often associated with heightened subjective distress. In Study 1, it was shown that while both sexes reported post-divorce negative thoughts, feelings and behaviour, the female divorcees reported suffering more in all three areas. However, for both male and female divorcees, the negative outcomes experienced were not static, but improvement occurred over time. In Study 1, 42 (47%) female and 19 (42%) male respondents held “negative views of self”; 38 (43%) women and nine (20%) men doubted their ability to “make decisions”; and 46 (52%) women and 14 (31%) men responded that they “could not cope”. In Study 2, the theme of “fear of having to cope on their own” was also articulated by Dalina, Eileen and Nancy. Interestingly, while all three of these divorcees were gainfully employed, they still remained emotionally very much attached to their ex-spouses. This kind of post-divorce spousal attachment seems highly probable if the woman is overly dependent on the husband emotionally, socially and financially. Such dependence is likely to contribute to feelings of vulnerability when the support from the spouse is withdrawn after divorce. The vulnerability and sense of low self-esteem would be further aggravated if the husband has been having an affair with someone who is perceived to be physically more attractive and younger.

In a relationship where there was a joint parenting role prior to the divorce, women are likely to be concerned when they have to assume a single-parent role. Bair (2007) also commented that women who are dependent on their ex-spouses experience greater
psychological stress in caring for themselves and completing everyday tasks. Although the present study did not directly explore this issue, it can be inferred from the data that the continuing attachment of some participants to their ex-spouses could also point to a certain lingering ambivalence over the divorce decision, as they were the petitioners in their divorce. In some of the narratives a tone of regret came through in the comments about negative outcomes and adjustment difficulties, especially in the case of Dalina.

In the quantitative survey the predominant negative feelings experienced by the respondents at the time of filing for divorce included sadness (66%), worry (49%), tension (46%), moodiness (43%), restlessness (40%), and fearfulness (40%). This finding is consistent with the data from the Ministry of Social Affairs (1979) study on non-Muslim divorce in Singapore. Interestingly, studies done by Raphael (1983), Rando (1993, 1996), Neimeyer (1998, 2002), Enright & Marwit (2002) and Worden (2002) in other countries reported similarly on the negative outcomes of divorce. These studies identified the most common negative outcomes to be affective responses, including sadness, guilt, anger, ambivalence, general irritability, intense yearning, numbness, shock and fatigue. Kitson (1992) also highlighted that feelings of negativity experienced by the divorcees are often due to losses they have suffered from the dissolution of their marriage, adding that even for the plaintiff, the initial feeling of shock and loss would be quite overwhelming.

The findings of the qualitative Study 2 mirror those of past research, with sadness mentioned most often by the participants. The counsellors also observed that regret and self-blame were the most prevalent feelings after divorce followed by shock and denial, and ambivalence and mixed feelings. According to Gahler (2006), divorcees have been found to suffer from anxiety, depression, and feelings of incompetence, rejection and loneliness. Wallerstein & Kelly (1980) observed that divorced individuals often feel guilty about the negative effects of their divorce on their children, and about their own
abandonment of culturally-accepted definitions of the good parent, husband or wife. It seems inevitable that a failed marriage would trigger similar negative emotions.

The data obtained from the three studies permit identification of some dominant patterns of post-divorce outcome experienced by Singaporean divorcees. These include numbness, shock, and grief, emotions similar to those observed by Gullo (1992). While most respondents felt sadness at the time of filing for divorce, the most common manifestation of negative behaviour was crying. Such a finding is in concert with Kubler-Ross’ (1969) “stages of grief”, and with Goode (1956) and Winch (1971) who reported that adjusting to divorce is likened more or less to the grief process. This was indeed identified by the female respondents in Study 1 who reported that they were crying for a long time post-divorce. It appears, though, that these ‘stages’ do not occur in a fixed order or singly, but are likely to recur, and even occur simultaneously. Thus, the journey towards recovery following divorce may not be a uniform or linear one. The most common negative behaviour, experienced by 19 (42%) of the male respondents in Study 1, was withdrawal. Although the manifestations of negative outcomes, crying and withdrawal are experienced by women, they tend to express negative emotions outwardly through tears, while men tend to bottle up their negative feelings behind a wall of detachment and withdrawal.

In Study 1, along with the negative impact on the emotions, the negative behaviours with the highest incidence reported by women immediately after filing for divorce were crying 59 (66%), loss of interest in previous activities 37 (42%), difficulty in daily routine 27 (30%), withdrawal 45 (51%), and difficulty planning ahead 34 (38%). In contrast, fewer men reported troubled behaviours, with only 9 (20%) of men indicating crying. There were few gender differences in negative behaviours related to difficulty in planning ahead and acting in agitated aggressive ways. In Study 2, six participants also
reported crying and grieving post-divorce. Such negative feelings immediately following
divorce may be accounted for by a number of factors, both personal and professional.
Divorcees might have to manage issues such as daily routines, loss of self-esteem,
embarrassment and social stigma at the work place, leisure-time impairment, financial
adjustments, and accessibility to their children, single parenthood, and continued
attachment to the former spouse.

A significant percentage of the respondents in the quantitative survey reported
suffering from a loss of appetite (27% men and 44% women), disrupted sleep (36% men
and 52% women) and an inability to sleep (33% men and 34% women) around the time of
the divorce. Similarly, in the qualitative studies, eating problems such as binging and lack
of appetite, and sleep disorders such as insomnia and recurrent nightmares were frequently
mentioned by both the divorcees and counsellors about their clients. In studies by Bloom,
Hodges & Caldwell, (1983) and Krumrei et al., (2007), sleeplessness, increased
susceptibility to infectious diseases and other illnesses were also identified as physical and
psychological manifestations of stress arising from a divorce. Law (1991) observed that
divorced Asian women may express negative emotions in the form of physical symptoms
or problem behaviours consistent with adjustment disorder, such as insomnia, headaches,
accidents, poor concentration, and having suicidal thoughts. In turn, such negative
emotions have negative impact on mental health. Other studies (Bloom, Hodges, &
Caldwell, 1983; Marks & Lambert, 1998; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Krumrei et al., 2007)
similarly reported a host of related unhealthy physical reactions.

According to Amato (2000), divorced individuals are at greater risk of health
problems and psychiatric disorders than their unmarried counterparts. Although there was
no clear data on mental health disorders in the quantitative study, almost half of the
respondents reported that they felt moody and unable to cope immediately after filing for
While some of these respondents recovered over time, a sizable portion retained feelings of moodiness (16%) and inability to cope (8%) more than six months later. It was also observed in the quantitative research that twice as many women as men reported negative thoughts in all categories of mental struggles. According to the Ministry of Social Affairs study (1979), women perceived more problems during marriage, at the time of separation, and after divorce. In that study over 55% of the female respondents experienced problems in the following rank order: (a) social criticism, (b) ill health, (c) child care, and (d) housing. In Studies 2 and 3, both the participants and counsellors identified four negative outcomes: experiencing negative emotions, financial issues, and difficulties in settling feelings of uncertainty/insecurities, and a sense of finality. These negative emotions were identified by both the counsellors and participants.

Along with similarities, the two groups differed in the outcomes they recognised. Eight negative outcomes were identified by the participants but not the counsellors. These outcomes were relational in nature and about half of them involved fears (of social disapproval, the opposite sex, and other people) experienced by the participants. Conversely, the outcomes recognised by the counsellors, but not the participants, related to mental and emotional factors. Counsellors reported that spousal abuse took the form of subtle emotional threat and the more obvious physical violence. This is not surprising given that the counsellors’ work involves listening to clients’ grievances and the management of their psychological well-being.

An examination of the outcomes identified by the male and female participants further revealed that women had more negative outcomes than men. Women tended to suffer more emotionally and on issues related to trust, coping with the future and the social stigma of divorce. Similar observations were made by Chui & Kwan (1997) who observed that women in Hong Kong are habituated to comply with social norms and cultural
expectation. This might be a burden for some women which, in a sense, explains why women experience more negative outcomes.

7.4.2: Positive Outcomes Post-divorce

In Study 1, an overwhelming 85%, of both male and female respondents, indicated positive post-divorce outcomes. Key positive divorce outcomes reported by respondents included, feeling happier and being at ease (64%); gaining more independence (61%); having a more positive outlook toward life (61%); enjoying peace and quiet (57%); having fewer quarrels (51%); experiencing financial freedom (38%); finding love again (32%); and no longer afraid (30%). For many of the respondents, these positive outcomes may have emanated from the cessation of marital conflicts that used to plague their daily lives. In Study 2, the positive outcomes identified included positive emotions; improved communication with ex-spouse; discovery of inner strength; making a fresh start; freedom to date again; and spiritual growth. Taken together, the findings of Studies 1 and 2 reveal significant positive outcomes after divorce.

The positive outcomes highlighted in both studies point to various forms of post-divorce growth especially in the recognition of new possibilities or paths for one’s life in consonance with the model of growth developed by Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996). This is a phenomenon in which divorcees grow beyond their previous level of psychological functioning as a result of positive post-divorce life experiences. The counsellors, for their part, highlighted two such examples of post-divorce growth among their clients after divorce: (a) a change in role and image identity, and (b) enjoyment of the new parenting role and including their ex-spouse in decision making. Similar findings were also reported by the “Well-Adjusted” and “Very-Well-Adjusted” participants of the qualitative study, with Katherine, Helen, Chitra, and Jenny sharing how they attempted to re-define themselves after their divorce. Given the social stigma of divorce, Katherine was initially
hesitant about identifying herself as a divorcee. She eventually accepted her new status and currently has no qualms identifying herself as such when completing forms. Chitra reported that she learnt to overcome the stigma of divorce by creating a new image so as to regain respect from her community. In Helen’s case, divorce led to new-found independence in which she gained confidence in accepting full responsibility for herself. Jenny saw the dissolution of her marriage as an opportunity to re-discover herself and to realise what she wanted out of life.

Re-working old relationships and developing new ones were positive outcomes experienced by Helen, Anna and Rajiv. On a broader scale, Mahesh became more active in his community, learnt how to communicate better, dealt with certain issues more effectively, and started to provide premarital counselling. In a way, and like many of the others, he saw his first marriage and divorce as a learning experience which he could now use to help others.

The findings of the qualitative and quantitative studies are largely consistent with existing literature. However, closer examination reveals some distinguishing aspects of the data. Radford, Travers-Gustafson, Miller, Archevesque, Furlong & Norris (1997) suggest that re-working the relationship with the ex-spouse was part of a successful post-divorce adjustment process. Yet, four participants in the qualitative study, Betty, Gopal, Jenny and Susan, rated themselves as being “Very Well-Adjusted” despite not having maintained contact with their ex-spouse. Notably, these participants did not have children in their marriage and so had no need to maintain the contact needed for joint decision-making in a parenting role. Another response with contrary evidence is the willingness to consider another relationship. In Katherine’s case, while she considered himself as “Very-Well-Adjusted”, she confessed that she probably would never be ready for another relationship. However, the reverse was true of four-time-married Oscar who rated himself as “Still
Trying to Adjust”. Although his fourth wife had actually left him 10 years before she filed for divorce, he did not discount remarrying. But as Oscar and Katherine could be exceptions, it makes sense to view the theories of adjustment within the larger context of other factors in the various individual cases. In a sense, positive outcomes and adjustments are varied and not all responses would fit neatly into the theories of adjustment. Perhaps it suffices to say that positive outcomes go hand-in-hand with positive growth post-divorce.

The in-depth interviews of Study 2 established that female participants reported more inner positive outcomes than men in areas such as peace, freedom, autonomy, a clear sense of identity, inner strength, self-growth, making a fresh start, and sharing their divorce experiences to help others. This is in alignment with another study on growth amongst divorced women by Radford et al. (1997). In that study, women were found to go beyond the divorce, into new lives they built for themselves. Many of the changes made by the female participants in Studies 1 and 2 showed that they were willing to settle into their new identity as divorced women by learning to value and redefine the self; developing new relationships; and re-working the old relationships with friends, the ex-spouse, and their children. Indeed, some of these female participants went on to look for ways to integrate themselves into a social world and were involved in meaningful activities in church or community organizations.

While there were fewer men than women in Study 2, more practical and immediate positive outcomes were experienced by a larger portion of the men. These included willingness to start dating again, remarriage and regaining control with the passage of time. Men may therefore be more likely to see another relationship or marriage as a possibility shortly after divorce. As for the difference between the men and women in their views on regaining control with time, this may relate to the different challenges they faced after divorce. As it is more likely for the women to be awarded custody of the children, this
could lead to more practical difficulties in everyday life for the women. The long-term childcare challenges faced by the women could result in a feeling that their time is not at their disposal; and this could explain why more male than female divorcees achieve a sense of regaining control over their lives after a lapse of time.

Of all the positive outcomes recognised by the divorcees in Study 2, only two themes were similarly identified by the counsellors: marshalling positive emotions and making a fresh start. Almost all the counsellors agreed that the divorcees’ acceptance that the relationship has changed and the ability to manage the present without reference to the failed relationship constituted a fresh start. Marshalling positive outcomes as an initial outcome of divorce was identified by more than half of the participants in Study 2 but recognized by almost all the counsellors. This is expected from the counsellors because in counselling they would focus on positive outcomes and new possibilities for their clients.

That the counsellors were more able at identifying positive outcomes than the participants is not surprising. Unlike in the West, marriage counselling has yet to gain wide acceptance in Singapore. The couples who see professional counsellors in Singapore tend to be in highly troubled marriages. Thus, they are also more likely to report positive feelings as an initial outcome of divorce. Furthermore, counsellors provide an additional form of social support, and their clients may be more disposed towards experiencing positive outcomes since they have taken the step forward to seek counselling. In contrast, the participants in Study 2 come from a full spectrum of divorcees from the “Most Well-Adjusted” to “Still Trying to Adjust”.

A closer examination of the positive emotions reported by the participants in Study 2 and the counsellors in Study 3 revealed similarities in the emotions identified as an initial outcome. The participants reported this as a sense of relief and freedom, and the counsellors referred to it as a sense of relief and autonomy. True to their profession, the
counsellors, but not the participants, emphasized the management of emotions such as emotional distancing, ability to let go, starting afresh and managing the grief process. Surprisingly, although some participants in Study 2 did not articulate such emotional management, they were able bring to their adjustment process a quality of rationalising and self-introspection that they could not have summoned up during the anguish of the pre-divorce period. This indicates that they have indeed moved on along the journey towards re-integration and self-growth.

It is evident from the present research that significant, substantial and concrete positive outcomes can accrue to divorcees post-divorce. Although most divorcees in these two studies suffered pain in various forms from the traumatic experience of a divorce, it is clear that they reaped immediate relief just after divorce and positive growth over time. This is consistent with the research literature on post-divorce outcomes and adjustments.

7.5: Research Question 4: What factors contribute to positive and negative post-divorce adjustments?

Factors Contributing To Positive Adjustment

An overwhelming number of factors that can potentially contribute to positive post-divorce adjustment have been identified in the literature (e.g., Chiriboga et al. 1978; Caldwell et al. 1983; Veevers 1991; and Cohen & Savaya 2003). In studying the responses in Study 1 and the interview data in Study 2 and Study 3, 16 factors were identified that appeared to contribute to the positive adjustment process of the Singaporean divorcees. Five factors are “demographic” factors and eleven are categorised under relationship factors, attitude towards divorce and support networks in divorce. Many of the 16 factors
identified in Study 2 are similar to the 17 “strens” response to divorce identified by Veevers (1991) as summarised in Chapter 2.

7.5.1: Demographic Factors

Subsumed under these demographic factors are five aspects: age, duration of marriage, having access to adequate income and materials resources, having tertiary education and having non-traditional gender roles.

(a) **Being younger** at the time of divorce was recognised in this research as contributing positively to adjustment. Twenty-six (19%) of the respondents in the quantitative study indicated their agreement with this statement. In Study 2, over half of the participants interviewed who said that they are well adjusted at the age of divorce were under the age of 36. It would appear that younger divorcees have more opportunities and time to forge new relationships and focus on their careers.

(b) **Having a shorter marriage** was confirmed as helping positive adjustment post divorce (Goode, 1956; Kurdek & Blisk, 1983). In Study 1, 22% of the respondents indicated this as a favorable factor in their adjustment. Notably, a higher percentage of men than women in Study 1 viewed shorter marriages as contributing positively to adjustment. This implies that for the men, the relationship might not have been sufficiently established to the extent that an abiding commitment was achieved. Concomitantly, the shorter duration of marriage might not have resulted in the accumulation of chronic frustrations and disappointments. In addition, men generally have a greater tendency to be away from the home for work and leisure activities; and so are likely to be more able to resume their “single” status quite seamlessly. Women, generally have more responsibility in the home and are less drawn to other social activities especially if the children are still very young making this a more difficult transition. Similarly, in Study 2, short marriages of fewer than 10 years’ duration were more common among the men than the women in the well-
adjusted groups. Shorter marriages tended to be less habituated, and couples are less set in
their life together. As their marriage had not reached a mature stage, they may not be as
emotionally and physically dependent on each other.

(c) Having access to adequate income and material resources was another
positive factor in post-divorce adjustment identified by 32% of the respondents in Study 1
and 25% of the counsellors in Study 3. In Study 2, Anna and Susan were relieved that they
had no financial worries post-divorce and that was a positive factor that facilitated their
positive adjustment.

Wang & Amato (2000) and Cohen & Savaya (2003) postulated that it is the
women who usually suffer more financially after divorce, as many stay home during their
marriage to look after the family. This finding appears to apply more to western societies
with a high labour cost, where it becomes necessary for many women to stop working to
look after their children, as they are not able to hire someone to help them with the
domestic work and child-raising. However, in Singapore many women continue to work
after marriage even after the children arrive. The Survey on Women Returning to Work,
1995, Ministry of Labour reported that almost all women surveyed were interested to
rejoin the workforce after their maternity leave. Since then, and because of the shortage of
manpower in Singapore, labour regulations have been eased to include flexi-working hours
and the building of more crèches allowing more women to rejoin the workforce.
Interestingly, more of the male participants in the qualitative interviews than the women
emphasized the importance of this factor for their post-divorce adjustment. The financial
outlay of the Singaporean men in a divorce may increase tremendously given the need to
pay maintenance to the ex-spouse and children, and also to sustain himself and for many, a
future partner. For one of the male participants, the lack of adequate income impacted
negatively on his adjustment because as a pastor, his income on its own was not sufficient
for him and his children to live on. Unlike the female participants who are protected by the Singapore Women’s Charter, the pastor in Study 2, who was in financial difficulty after the divorce, was not entitled to alimony from his higher-income-earning ex-wife even though he was granted custody of the children.

(d) **Having a tertiary education** appeared to be beneficial to adjustment post divorce. This was reported in Study 2 by more than half of the participants with tertiary education who considered themselves “Well-Adjusted”. This is consistent with the findings of Cohen & Savaya (2003). However, in Study 1, out of the 46% of respondents who attained tertiary education, only 17% concurred that having a tertiary education was helpful to positive adjustment. There are several possibilities that could account for such a seeming discrepancy. Divorcees with higher education in Study 1 might not have perceived that their higher education could have played a role in their positive adjustment post-divorce. When asked to identify from a list of factors those which could have contributed to their positive adjustment, divorcees with a higher level of education might have felt that personal resourcefulness, positive outlook and/or religious beliefs were more important than level of education. In addition, the respondents might not have seen the direct association of having a high level of education to positive adjustment because the link is not immediately obvious. Indeed, having a tertiary education might have been perceived by the respondents as personal resourcefulness.

In Study 2, however, the participants had more time to reflect on and respond to the probing questions. Iris, Helen, Jenny and Susan believed that their educational background paved the way for them to build on their careers and that sense of achievement helped in their positive adjustment.

(e) **Having non-traditional gender roles** in which both husband and wife were able to play interchangeable roles contributed well to positive adjustment. This factor allows
both partners to be more flexible and less dependent on the assigned rigid roles, as discussed in the findings of Bloom & Clement (1984). In Study 1, a third of the respondents (32%) indicated this was a positive factor with more women (43%) than men (10%) reporting that having non-traditional roles as helpful for divorce adjustment. In Study 2, the interviewees emphasized the importance of the factor. Anna, for example, shared that after the divorce she eased into the role of head of the household, while her domestic helper assumed her former role in looking after the home and children. More liberal attitudes towards gender roles are likely to facilitate both male and female divorcees to take on their spouses’ responsibilities without discomfort or shame. Hence, flexibility in assuming dual gender roles gives them the confidence of being a single parent. In a sense, it does appear that the less traditional they are, the better they are at surviving the divorce, and with minimal distress.

7.5.2: Relationship Factors

Relationship factors were found to impact directly on the emotional, psychological and physical adjustment to divorce and the factors identified in the present research include: level of marital distress; lower level of attachment; having a positive relationship with their ex-spouse; and being the initiator of the divorce.

(f) Level of marital distress had a clear influence on positive adjustment. In Study 1, 15% of the respondents indicated that level of positive adjustment increased if marital distress had been high. In addition, of the seven participants in Study 2 who came from abusive marriage, six reported that they were now “Very-Well Adjusted”. Retrospective reports by Susan, Katherine, Queenie and Gopal indicated that marital turmoil and subjective distress constituted significant stressors in their marriages. Susan and Queenie recalled the immense pain of their long marital problems and the attendant defensive actions, and added that when the divorce process was over they experienced immediate
positive changes in their health and psychological status. The stark comparison between a high level of distress pre-divorce and the reassuring feeling of relief at divorce was overwhelmingly obvious for both of them. However, Dalina was an exception. Despite having suffered a high level of marital distress, she was still trying to adjust after nine years of divorce, and remained emotionally in need of the marriage and the “spousal” relationship. In Dalina’s case, she had a very high level of attachment to her ex-spouse and it was probably this factor that made Dalina an outlier; an exception from the other divorcees who were interviewed in Study 2. A probable reason that could have led her to be different from the rest was that she isolated herself and the children, and would not consider the possibility of getting emotional support and practical help from family, relatives or friends. As a result, she encountered difficulties managing her loneliness, shame, inadequacy and rejection. Another likely reason was that while the legal route taken had effectively terminated the marriage, Dalina was still emotionally bound to her ex-spouse and never quite left him. It was a dichotomy. Dalina reported that even as she struggled with the full acceptance of the divorce, she clung on to old sentimental and romantic memories and was still yearning for her ex-spouse. A third reason could ironically be attributed to Dalina’s regret and guilt for not having tolerated the discomfort and pain of physical abuse and infidelity. Indeed, in spite of his affairs with other women outside the marriage, Dalina’s ex-spouse had never abandoned her until she initiated the divorce. This sense of loss was felt more acutely given that she had always been very dependent on him for love, support and physical availability. In comparison, Katherine, Queenie and Susan were very relieved that the marital distress was over and that they could move on and carry on with their careers and with parenting their children. The counsellors, however, could not offer any views on this because there was little follow-up on their clients after divorce.
(g) **Having a lower level of attachment** was also a positive factor in adjustment. Low attachment to ex-spouses impacted positively on the adjustment of 36% of the respondents in Study 1. It appears that when there was only a low level of attachment, the emotional bonding was weaker and the breakup easier and more comfortable without much rancour or distress. As a result, the divorcees with a lower level of attachment were less likely to harbour anger, love or hate for the ex-spouses and were less likely to have to go through complex grief issues, thus making their adjustment easier. In such cases, divorce legally breaks the bond between spouses. In contrast, Dalina and Felicia from Study 2 had a strong attachment to their ex-spouse and this made it very hard for them to adjust even after several years of divorce. Felicia maintained a dependent attachment to her ex-spouse even though they were officially divorced and she would try to engage herself in his family’s activities such as funerals, weddings and birthdays. Another possible reason both Felicia and Dalina could not quite detach themselves could be because they harboured a hope or fantasy that the few interchanges they had with their ex-spouse might lead to a chance of reconciliation. This factor was not identified by any of the counsellors. Perhaps, divorcees who are already emotionally detached from their ex-spouse might not perceive the necessity to seek counselling.

(h) **Having a positive relationship with their ex-spouse** also contributed to the divorcees’ positive adjustment. A positive relationship could mean that there was emotional closure and a willingness on both sides to work on the divorce and adjust to a different post-divorce relationship. In Study 1, 17% reported that having a positive relationship with their ex-spouse was beneficial to their divorce adjustment. Another prominent theme contributing to positive post-divorce adjustment of the participants in Study 2 was maintaining a positive relationship with the ex-spouse, regardless of their level of attachment with the ex-spouse pre-divorce. Nancy, Eileen, Anna and Felicia had
established amicable arrangements with their ex-spouse which permitted agreeable visitations and joint responsibility for their children and this resulted in less stress for both parties. As it is more likely in Singapore for women to be granted child custody under the Women’s Charter, it appears that the women in Study 2 appreciated the advantages of maintaining cordial relationships with their ex-husbands as it would be less stressful for all concerned. Such cordial relationships would help to prevent prolonged legal custody contest that might otherwise involve great financial and emotional costs. The positive relationship with the ex-spouse would also accrue the added benefit of being able to make joint decisions concerning their children’s welfare. In summary, the nature and quality of the relationship that a divorcee has with the ex-spouse pre- and post-divorce seem to have some influence on the divorcee’s level of adjustment. Indeed, it does appear that a low level of attachment and a positive working relationship with the ex-spouse, especially where children are involved, contributes to positive adjustment.

(i) Being the initiator of a divorce emerged as a significant factor in positive post-divorce adjustment, and the findings among 46% of the respondents in Study 1 support the notion that initiators of divorce as postulated by Pettit & Bloom (1984) and Wang & Amato (2000), can perceive more benefits in a separation, and are less likely to be upset by it. It can be inferred, therefore, that being the initiator can have benefits and thereby contribute to their positive adjustment. In Study 2, the interview data of majority of the participants also bear this out. Indeed, 12 out of the 13 participants of Study 2 who rated themselves as “Very Well-Adjusted” were the ones who had initiated the divorce. Their interviews suggested that all except Rajiv seemed to have a psychological advantage over their spouses and felt vindicated when their divorce petition was granted. To a certain extent, initiating the divorce affected the initiators appeared to have a measure of control over the situation which in turn, gave them strength and time to process the loss and the
pain of divorce. For example, Queenie on the advice of her children left her husband to prepare for her divorce and when the divorce was finally granted, she felt no distress at all. The counsellors in Study 3 also agreed that the initiators of divorce were more psychologically prepared for the stress brought about by divorce. Ahrons (1995) also concurred that the initiators have a time advantage to grieve and prepare for detachment.

It was found in Study 1 that more women than men indicated being the initiator of divorce as a theme in positive adjustment. This aligns with Thompson & Walker (1991) who reported that women were more aware of relationship problems sooner; and were therefore, more likely to initiate discussion with their partners. Some women in Study 2 narrated that when they realised that despite discussion they were still unable to salvage the marriage, they were more inclined to file for divorce.

Conversely, non-initiators such as Oscar and Latif played a passive role and had the decision made for them, and in spite of the many years of divorce, the two men still rated themselves as “Still Trying to Adjust”. Perhaps, as suggested by Gray & Silver (1990) and Hagestad & Smyer (1982), they felt victimised in a life change that they either did not want or were unsure they wanted; and they had little or no control over the change.

7.5.3: Attitude towards Divorce

A divorcee’s attitude towards divorce is influenced by society, culture and views of marriage and divorce. This attitude is central to the divorcees’ adjustment because it can affect the individuals’ inclinations, thinking and feelings, prejudice, fears and convictions about divorce and adjustment. Hence, how well they adjust depends very much on this attitude which is shaped by family and the society within which they live. Two aspects of this attitude that emerged in the data include: viewing divorce as a normal event and not a personal failure; and having inner personal resources.
Viewing divorce as a normal event and not a personal failure evidently helped in the adjustment process. Not viewing divorce as an aberration and an abject personal failure was another positive attitude to divorce that the divorcees found helped them adjust. Wang & Amato (2000) reported that adjustment was associated positively with having favourable attitudes towards marital dissolution. Study 1 confirmed the findings of Wang & Amato (2000), with 69% of the respondents attesting that not viewing divorce as a personal failure was rated highest among 18 factors from which they were asked to choose. In Study 2, nine of the participants narrated that having a positive outlook also contributed to their adjustment.

Even with the participants who adjusted well, the varying attitudes on divorce - ranging from associating divorce with moral failure due to religion, family upbringing, and prevailing social mores to having a cavalier acceptance of divorce - meant that the degree of adjustment was not uniform. Ultimately, how one perceive divorce will depend on one’s view of the marriage. Such an attitude is influenced by one’s family values, the legal system, religious beliefs and societal acceptance of divorce as a sense of normality. Being married or divorced is an important label of a person’s social identity; hence, whether divorce is perceived as a de facto failure rests very much on the level of stigma attached to it. A local study (Wong, Yeoh, Graham & Teo, 2004) commented that the Singapore tends to “configure the divorcee as ‘unfortunate’”. It appears that the degree of stigmatization is more keenly felt when divorcees are confronted with awkward questions regarding their marital status, and with derisive remarks from friends and relatives. Indeed, when the divorce brings with it financial problems and the divorcees find themselves seeking help from welfare organizations, the stigma experienced is more pointed. However, Wong & Kuo (1983) observed that the level of social stigma associated with divorce has been on the gradual decline in Singapore. Ismail Ibrahim, the executive director of the Association of
Muslim Professionals (AMP) revealed that with the waning of the stigma that accompanies a divorce, there has been an observable increase in the number of ethnic Malay and Muslim women seeking divorce. Apparently, if love, happiness, and self-fulfillment take priority, then the social stigma attached to divorce will begin to diminish and fade, and become less significant and important to divorcees.

*(k) Having personal inner resources* was another factor influencing divorce adjustment. In Study 1, 51% reported that an important factor to the adjustment process was the availability of personal inner resources such as resourcefulness and a sense of control. These factors appear to impact the individual’s cognitive understanding, vulnerability, and psychological capacity to cope with the vicissitudes of divorce. In fact, Dreman (1999) found that an individual’s attitude towards divorce is influenced by personal variables such as temperament. In Dalina’s case, she was in a state of despair for many years because she could not open herself to her family, people at work, or to the community for support. She had always been physically and emotionally dependent on her husband; and once this clutch was removed it affected her adjustment negatively post-divorce. Among the divorcees in Study 2 who considered themselves well adjusted, it was observed that many of these factors – cognitive understanding and psychological capacity to cope with stress - contained within them elements of resilience, which guided the individuals to search for and develop strengths and resources that, in turn, enabled them to withstand and overcome the vagaries of divorce, as well as ultimately helping them grow from the experience. In short, resilience during a traumatic event was translated to growth in the post-traumatic period for five of the divorcees who became stronger and more confident in decision-making because they possessed this personal resourcefulness. Betty and Helen were amazed that they had the emotional strength to cope with the divorce, and this helped them adjust better. Interestingly, Anna and Chitra experienced increased self-
esteem and self-care, the positive effects of the adjustment after divorce. Indeed, the closure of divorce allowed the two divorcees to focus on themselves and their future. The counsellors, on their part, pointed out that some of their clients had more resilient personalities than others, and this was one reason why they adjusted better. This form of positive growth was highlighted by Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996) as outcomes influenced by an individual’s view of and attitude towards stressful events. Hence, a divorcee’s positive attitude towards the divorce appears to bring about positive adjustment through his/her inner strength and resilience.

7.5.4: Support Networks in Divorce

Support networks in divorce come from the bonds and obligations of relationships of family, friends and colleagues. In the present study, such support, if available emotionally and physically, was found to help the divorcees in adjusting to the psychological distress after divorce. The support networks identified included having social support, having children, having a new dating relationship, engaging in meaningful activities and seeking professional help.

(l) Having social support was a recurrent theme and the most frequently cited of the eight themes related to external factors influencing positive adjustment observed in Studies 2 and 3. Indeed, supportive social networks emerged as key factors in post-divorce adjustment for divorcees in Singapore. Social support from friends, families and religious communities was a major theme for 11 (73%) of the women and 3 (60%) of the men in Study 2. The type of support provided to the women appeared to be primarily practical and emotional in nature, usually in the form of help and advice in managing children and household, and having someone to empathise with their woes and pain. In both studies, the women consistently enjoyed more social support than their male counterparts. In the case of Anna, she experienced a great sense of loss following the divorce. However, the
presence of a domestic helper provided her with the needed support. This is significant as most working mothers in Singapore depend on domestic help to mind their children and manage the home, and this would be even more pressing if they are single parents. In Study 1, 57% of the respondents also sought support from peers during the adjustment period and 7 (37%) in Study 2 found support in their friends.

(m) **Having children** was another factor identified by the participants and counsellors in the qualitative studies as a consideration in adjustment. For some participants their children became the focal support of their lives post-divorce, while others saw children as a source of strength and hope for tomorrow. This positive outlook may have come about because there was no more discord over parenting styles, child custody and support. More importantly, for participants like Anna, Queenie and Katherine, children gave meaning to their lives, and provided moral support during their process of adjustment. Having older children was particularly helpful as these children could help to look after the younger ones and do some household chores. Children thereby provided both psychological and emotional comfort to the divorcees, and for some, a source of physical assistance. More importantly, while these divorcees may have lost their spousal role, they managed to retain their parental role and this helped to give their lives purpose.

(n) **Having a new dating relationship** was another factor favourable to positive adjustment especially for men. In Study 1, many of the men (44%) pursued new relationships, and appeared to have benefited more from this factor than the women (22%). This was further shown in Study 2, and is understandably so when female participants such as Dalina and Betty lamented that some men look upon divorced women as easy sexual prey, and without the least pretence of a romantic relationship. In addition, women usually have custody of young children in Singapore following a divorce, and this may be an impediment to the possibility of a second marriage. Nonetheless, five divorcees in Study
two of them with young children, started dating again and were able to enjoy positive adjustments soon after the divorce.

(o) **Engaging in meaningful activities** helped to fill leisure time and provided another way of coping and gaining support with the post-divorce experience. This was mentioned by participants across all groups as a factor in positive adjustment. Many of the participants further suggested the importance of engaging in meaningful activities including hobbies, gainful employment, spending time with children, rebuilding home and family and leisure activities. Some of these activities occurred in organized settings (e.g., social dancing, religious activities and attending courses). Such activities also open up possibilities of making new friends, and thus may further offer support and help adjustment (Kitson, 1992).

Other activities found to be both meaningful and helpful were reading self-help books, caring for children and going to church. In terms of engaging in meaningful activities, participants strongly recommended seeking employment, particularly for those who have never worked and those who have stopped work after getting married. They saw this as potentially pivotal in providing a new life pattern that could decidedly facilitate post-divorce growth.

(p) **Seeking professional help** from counsellors, psychiatrists, lawyers, doctors and court mediators was cited frequently in all three studies as contributing to positive adjustment. However, only 22% of the respondents in Study 1 indicated that access to counselling service contributed to positive adjustment. The participants in Study 2 believed that seeking professional help was definitely useful but many of them did not approach counsellors for help themselves after the divorce. The counsellors in Study 3 also shared this observation and pointed out that they saw couples only when they were
already in the midst of a troubled marriage and that once they have decided to file for
divorce they would seldom continue with counselling sessions.

The rate of seeking professional help is low perhaps because in Singapore,
seeking psychiatric help and other forms of counselling is still not widely accepted and
seems to carry with it a stigma, especially for men. It is unfortunate that the act of
voluntarily attending counselling sessions is anathema to many Singaporeans; and some
female participants even expressed deep concern and fear over others discovering that they
were undergoing counselling. The pertinent question then to ask is: What holds men and
women back from a process that has the potential to provide support and emotional
adjustment? Krehbiel (2009) explained that many men have an underlying belief that runs
counter to the notion of pursuing personal counselling. He postulated that it could be a
cultural and primal predisposition that mitigates against the vulnerability necessary for
seeking therapy. The male participants, on the other hand, relied very much on the
informal company of friends or “drinking buddies”, except for Rajiv, who attended
sessions with church counsellors.

7.6: Counsellors’ Contribution to Positive Post-divorce Adjustments

From the findings of Studies 1 and 2, it would appear that counsellors can play an
important role in several ways to help their clients adjust to life after divorce. In particular,
they can help their clients realise, in advance, the potential impact of divorce on their way
of life. This is not possible by mere verbal counselling but requires various therapeutic
exercises such as visualising the losses and gains of life after divorce. Clients who engaged
in counselling were thereby better to make an informed choice on whether to proceed with
divorce or explore other options. If they eventually chose to file for divorce, they had
forewarning of the possible outcomes and this helped alleviate some of the negative impact of divorce.

In conclusion, the data from the three studies confirmed that Veevers (1991)’s 17 “strens” response to divorce are still applicable to the study of divorce in Singapore except for the geographical factor, gender and duration between decision made to actual termination of divorce. The geographical factor is not relevant to a small island state like Singapore, while relevance of the gender factor cannot be determined because there were more female than male divorcees in the research. With regard to the duration factor, this is also not relevant to Singapore since most, if not all of the divorces took at least three years to terminate as required by the Women’s Charter. In Study 2, all 15 participants who were “Well-Adjusted”, fulfilled most of the factors identified in this research as assisting divorce adjustment, and which approximate Veevers’ “strens”, except for three factors: initiators, being relatively young and length of marriage. Dalina and Felicia were initiators in their divorce, but both were still trying to adjust at the time of the interview. Latif and Dalina divorced at a relatively young age, but they still had not adjusted fully. Penny and Queenie had been married for over 20 years but contrary to Veevers’ “strens”, they reported having adjusted well.

7.7: Research Question 5: Are there any interventions that divorcees and counsellors could use to salvage a troubled marriage?

This section examines the interventions, if any, that divorcees and counsellors could use to salvage troubled marriages. In response to this question in Study 1, 63 respondents (46.3%) said “Yes”, 25 (18.4%) unsure, and 46 (33.8%) answered “No”. A higher proportion than expected indicated that something could be done to save their
All 19 participants, including the 12 divorcees who felt their marriage was no longer salvageable in Study 2, enthusiastically provided ideas for strategies and interventions to save troubled marriages. A common strategy revealed in Study 2 and 3 was that early interventions during the marital conflict were considered useful. This could imply that once divorce is decided upon, interventions would be ineffective. Obviously, preventive measures in identifying early signs of marital problems and mapping out strategies to overcome these pitfalls would be necessary and useful. However, while such intervention is critical, the seven counsellors felt that couples do not usually avail themselves of counselling early, and when they finally do so sometimes the marriage is, already too late to salvage. The reasons they gave why many couples in troubled marriages might not seek early interventions included the following: denial and refusal to acknowledge that there is a problem; a lack of awareness of the indicators of troubled marriages; an inability to link the signs and symptoms to the problems; and an overwhelming paralysis when confronted with the problems.

Findings from the three studies about interventions and strategies to salvage troubled marriages are discussed below.

7.7.1: Improving Communication in Troubled Marriages

The findings in the three studies suggest that improving marital communication is vital as an early intervention. In Study 1, 36% of the respondents acknowledged that in helping a difficult marriage, improving communication and dialogue was important as well as learning to be more accepting when managing differences in discussion.

Eight participants in Study 2 reported that engaging in discussions about marital challenges such as financial issues, lack of time together and problems about physical intimacy could be helpful in preventing marriage break-up. In Study 3, based on their clinical experience, counsellors discussed communication as central to keeping a marriage
intact. They also offered strategic viewpoints to work through and maintain a marriage. A preventive approach that facilitates open and authentic communication, as well as the adoption of a non-confrontational attitude towards marital differences, was advocated.

It seems, therefore, that having a willingness to identify marital challenges, together with a commitment to initiate resolution through healthy communication, is paramount. Two counsellors clarified that healthy communication requires developing skills such as, listening with empathy, sincere articulation of concerns, cultural sensitivity and appreciation of different communication styles. Having developed these communication skills, the couple can then proceed to define clear marital goals.

7.7.2: Pre-marriage Preparation and Marital Counselling

Pre-marital and marital counselling was identified as important in Study 2 and 3. Three participants considered pre-marriage preparation necessary to better prepare couples for potential problems such as finances, children, religion and even vacation in most marriages. This view was shared by counsellors in Study 3 who strongly advocated marriage preparation to help clients be mentally prepared for new lives with their partners. Six counsellors believed that pre-marital counselling can facilitate a platform for managing potential problems and differences. Having addressed these issues early, both parties can have a clearer sense of what their life commitments entail.

In the Ministry of Social Affairs (1979) study, it was recommended that to prevent “hasty divorces”, counselling services for young couples registering for marriage, and counselling for married couples encountering marital troubles should be implemented and strengthened. The present findings confirm that marital counselling is deemed as a possible way to cope with marital problems. In Study 1, 31% of the respondents reported that accepting formal help in counselling is necessary in saving marriages in general. Nine participants in Study 2 felt that marital counselling might have resolved some marital
conflicts. Counsellors also agreed that seeking early marital intervention was crucial in troubled marriages. They highlighted also the need for couples to manage expectations during the marriage. Couples therapy is most effective when there is a willingness to practise a give-and-take attitude; to work towards mutual forgiveness; to agree on a shared agenda; to learn to be more accepting when managing differences; and to focus on the positives in a marriage.

7.7.3: Therapeutic Support Group

From the three studies, it would be helpful for Registered Counsellors in Singapore to facilitate support groups for both men and women by allowing them to tell their stories and be heard without fear of being judged and rejected. Indeed, for many divorcees, discovering that one’s own divorce experience is similar to that of others can be very reassuring and therapeutic. The support groups organised by the counsellors should be able to provide a temporary community, particularly for women in Singapore whose social network is limited. Considering that most divorced women cited other women as their major source of support, it might well be useful to set up special groups for divorced women and men. Such facilitating support groups for divorcees of both sexes would also provide them with the opportunity to hear narratives from the perspective of the opposite sex, and in so doing, gain a deeper and perhaps even better insight. Engaging in discussion and group activities would help hasten the re-adjustment process of the divorcees, and foster the building up of confidence and self-esteem so as to recover a positive outlook on life again. Counsellors could then help divorcees begin to understand that everyone concerned, no matter how cruel or destructive they might have seemed, was acting out of his or her limitations and pain. In this sense, clients would be more willing to lay aside any blame and feelings of victimisation, and perhaps even go down the path of forgiveness, which would ultimately lead to reintegration and wholeness.
7.7.4: Efforts to Salvage the Marriage

Study 2 also showed that the loss of spousal love and care as well as desertion, are factors that block marital reconciliation. Such negative spousal behaviours are manifestations of a decision, whether conscious or unconscious, to opt out of marriage. The participants’ suggestions for salvaging marriages could be broadly grouped into three categories, namely, (i) effort from self, (ii) effort from both partners and (iii) external interventions. Of these, most participants pointed to the effort and commitment made by both marriage partners as the most crucial intervention to salvage a troubled marriage. More than half of those interviewed felt they could not save their marriage due to a lack of spousal commitment to work hand-in-hand on the marital issues.

7.7.5: Differences in Attitude Concerning Salvaging Marriages

While the divorcees in Studies 1 and 2 may have encountered similar marital difficulties such as adultery, gambling problems, misuse of substances and irreconcilable differences they did not necessarily share the same attitude towards saving the marriage. Several factors could have accounted for the differences. First, variation in situational factors may impact divorcees differently. Even in identifying a specific trigger like adultery, one cannot fathom the possibly complex interpretation of the trigger or the emotional responses interwoven with the interpretation of adultery that are unique to each individual. Thus, the reaction towards different marital difficulties may vary from person to person. For example in Study 1, out of the 32 respondents whose spouses had extra-marital affairs, 14 believed the marriage could not have been salvageable, but 11 believed otherwise and seven stated that they were unsure whether their marriage could have been saved.

One might also consider viewing each divorcee as undergoing a multiple number of situational factors as well as reacting emotionally to these factors in a complex and unique
way. Identifying any one trigger as a predictor of whether interventions could be taken to save the marriage over-simplifies the complexity of the marital experience. In Study 2, several participants reported adultery to be a part of their marital experience, yet it was a separate triggering event that led them to believe at that point that their marriage could not be salvaged. Katherine and Dalina tolerated their spouses’ adultery as they attempted to save their troubled marriage; and yet when there was physical abuse, they believed then that their marriage could not be salvaged.

A third factor involves the interpretation of triggering events which can affect the individual’s decision whether to salvage the marriage. For example, a spouse may tolerate and forgive the partner’s adultery if the spouse has strong and abiding love for the partner. Some individuals tend to rationalise the partner’s adultery, and believe in forgiving and giving the spouse a second chance. However, a point may be reached when the feelings of trust and love have been broken beyond repair; and with that, the motivation to salvage the marriage would no longer exist.

In Study 2, at the time of the interview, 11 participants on hindsight felt that their marriage was no longer salvageable despite their best efforts. They lamented that their ex-spouse had displayed no interest at all in saving the marriage. The possibility of having actually failed to utilise every possible option to salvage the marriage could also have dissuaded the participants from re-visiting their failed marriage. Perhaps for them, revisiting such doubts could be destructive to their sense of closure and resolution. Hence, in spite of the very clear and obvious advantage of intervention strategies, marriages can only be saved if both partners communicate and seek early intervention.
7.8: Research Question 6: What are the similarities and differences between counsellors and divorcees in their viewpoints on adjustment and experiences?

Unlike the other research questions, Question 6 required comparisons between the views of counsellors and divorcees. This was addressed by including comparisons in the above discussion across the three studies.

7.9: Research Question 7: Are there interventions that divorcees and counsellors could adopt to facilitate post-divorce growth?

This section discusses the interventions divorcees and counsellors could take in terms of the route to recovery from distress following the divorce experience. On the basis of the findings of the three studies it would seem that rather than seeking simply to reduce the inevitable impact of divorce, it is important also to examine interventions that divorced persons and counsellors could implement to facilitate post-divorce growth. While reducing negative factors and outcomes are obviously necessary for adjustment, it is not possible for divorcees to pre-empt, forestall, eradicate or reduce the pain and negativity of the divorce experience. As divorce can be seen as a process, so is the recovery from it; and it is a process that all divorcees have to go through before they can experience a sense of renewal. This was reinforced by Ahrons & Rodgers (1987) who stated that divorce inevitably results in psychopathology for those involved and they suggested that divorce can be a normative developmental process that contributes to growth for those impacted by it. Therefore, healing will occur over time, but the possibilities of post-divorce growth depend on the ability of the divorcees themselves to adopt effective strategies and interventions to contribute to the process of adaptation to their new life. A richer
understanding of the significance of positive factors and divorce outcomes can be drawn from the findings of the three research studies; and these factors help form the basis of the interventions for post-divorce positive growth.

This section focuses on three outcomes which are, in a sense, in concert with the well-established work of Calhoun & Tedeschi (2002) on Post-traumatic Growth (PTG). In their work on trauma, three broad themes of positive benefits were reported consistently by survivors of trauma: (a) changes in their self-perception, (b) enhancement of relationships in some ways, and (c) changes in life philosophy. The relevance of these themes is discussed in the context of the present data on post-divorce and adjustment. Post-divorce growth was clearly evident in all three studies conducted for this thesis. The quantitative data of Study 1 showed that respondents’ capacity to see new possibilities was the key aspect of post-traumatic growth contributing to better post-divorce adjustment in the divorce sample. It is also an affirmed observation by clinicians that critical life crises offer possibilities for positive personal change (Yalom & Lieberman, 1991; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2000). Furthermore, the qualitative data of Study 2 provided clear evidence that post-divorce growth was experienced by the majority of the participants. Data obtained from divorce counsellors in Study 3 also documented instances of post-divorce growth which they had observed among clients who sought counselling.

Post-divorce Growth: Divorcees’ and Counsellors’ Perspectives

7.9.1: Changes in Self-perception

In Study 2, five of the participants who experienced growth reflected that recovery and growth were brought about by increased self-awareness of their own inner strength and resourcefulness. Some participants discovered an ability to overcome the stigma of being a divorcee, and they were also able to redefine themselves psychologically. Chitra and Anna
are examples of individuals who underwent transformational growth by reinventing their image and social status, and by paying more attention to their physical well-being which they had neglected while they were married. Through this, they discovered new-found strength, resilience and wisdom. In turn, this helped them re-gain respect from their families, relatives and friends, and they developed self-love and changed their perception of themselves. As Calhoun & Tedeschi (1998a) suggested, a person who has experienced post-traumatic growth could well be described as wiser. This observation was reinforced by half of the counsellors in Study 3. These counsellors believed that divorcees who adopted a “positive outlook” on their post-divorce future, liberated themselves from negativity, and acknowledged their human vulnerability, were able to focus more on self-care and re-build self-confidence. This, to the counsellors, was seen as significant post-divorce growth.

In Study 1, one of the key strengths identified by respondents as helpful for divorce adjustment was not viewing divorce as a personal failure (69%). This supports the view that post-divorce growth is related to how well one is able to reframe the divorce as a constructive event. Calhoun & Tedeschi (2002) described ‘growth’ as undergoing painful stress, coming to terms with the struggle and using it as an event for potential benefit. Positive change in self-perception according to them was a feature of growth after traumatic events.

7.9.2: Enhancement of Relationships with Others

Enhancement of relationships is another form of growth after traumatic events (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2002). In Study 1, 17% of the respondents reported that having a cordial relationship with the ex-spouse contributed to their positive adjustment, adding that they had rebuilt a new relationship with their ex-spouse based entirely on a platonic and non-sexual role. Such a relationship has gone beyond the absence of conflict and quarrel
with the ex-spouse into a more respectful, compassionate and open model. Indeed, 61% of the respondents felt more self-assured with their new-found inner strength and independence. With this new transformation, they are able to do family projects together.

Similarly in Study 2, it is evident from the reports of seven participants that the absence of negative feelings and the ability to enjoy open communication with respectful listening and empathy with the ex-spouse. Susan and Chitra who reported growth in terms of increased compassion for their ex-spouses described that as a result of their own sufferings, they have been able to develop more empathy for people experiencing adversity from mental illnesses. Both shared that they were able to see new meanings in the larger context, and with new psychological constructs, they decided to enter the helping professions to assist others in expressing their emotions instead of suppressing them, which they did in their very stressful marriages. Eileen, Katherine and Anna shared that the divorce led them to develop inner resources and new found strength to rebuild a new way of living in which they believed they could better manage stress in relationship should the need arise. Increased closeness with friends, new spouses, relatives and family members was reported predominantly by Anna, Katherine, Mahesh, Rajiv, Susan and Betty.

Both men (44%) and women (22%) in Study 1 reported that having a new relationship after a divorce brought about positive adjustment. Jenny, Chitra and Anna, for example, adjusted very well after the divorce, and once they started dating, the adjustment accelerated. Their growth was evident, and they brought into their new relationships an increased self-esteem and a new sense of freedom. This helped them develop a deeper level of warmth with their new partners which they could not have with their ex-spouse. Chitra, who was in a communication impasse with her ex-husband for 10 years, was able to leave behind all the hurt and pain of her previous marriage. She reported growth in the
level of comfort she felt when expressing her emotions to her new husband, and how she now enjoys a closer and more intimate relationship with her family.

In Study 1, 61 women out of the total of 76 respondents considered supportive peers as contributing significantly to positive adjustment. The practical help, guidance and direction provided by these sources enhance the opportunities for increased self-disclosure, encourage engagement, and liberate emotional expression. Susan started reflecting upon the divorce while attending support group activities in church. Through the group-process, she began to articulate her pain and gradually started becoming philosophical about the process of “the death of the marriage”. She reported that this facilitated her post-divorce growth. Such positive growth promotes closeness among members of the social groups but more importantly, they present opportunities to help develop in divorcees the capacity to share and articulate feelings openly in relationships.

All three studies in this thesis, and the findings derived from the previous studies, emphasise that social support helps post-divorce growth (e.g., Garvin, Kalter, & Hansell, 1993; Siegel, Schrimshaw & Pretter, 2005). Tedeschi & Calhoun (2001) similarly observed that social networks are indispensable to the growth process, particularly in the area of providing new perspectives related to growth and empathetic acceptance of the divorce. In Study 1 and 2, many of the divorcees singled out social support as a factor that facilitated positive adjustment. Social networks are considered important buffers against loneliness and emptiness in the divorcees’ lives as they help fill the void after a divorce. Beyond developing new and personal relationships, active involvement in support groups is likely to increase the chances of positive growth by offering new opportunities and perspectives that facilitate a schema change upon which new social ties, social support and new relationships can be reconstructed.
7.9.3: Changes In Philosophy of Life

Changes in philosophy of life are a third form of growth after a trauma (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2002). In Study 1, the sub-scales of PTGI found that the sub-dimension of “seeing new possibilities” made a significant contribution to adjustment. Having a “positive outlook toward life” was also endorsed by respondents (53%) as one of the key positive outcomes achieved after divorce. Similarly, eight female participants in Study 2 expressed that post-divorce growth can be achieved by having a “positive outlook” and by increasing one’s awareness of internal resources.

Mahesh reported growth as a change in life priorities and direction as he made a decision to replace his self-destructive drinking and abusive life-style with a healthier one. Today, he has a greater appreciation of his marital, spiritual and work life. Similarly, Oscar, who developed an increased awareness and acceptance of his past vulnerability, questioned the meaning of life. He has decided that the purpose of his life today is to undo the sufferings that he has caused others in the past.

Practising self-reflection by reading self-help books helped Queenie to understand and be engaged in fundamental existential matters. Existential questioning while unpleasant for her has resulted in growth as she develops a new philosophical outlook that helps her come to terms with the reasons for her divorce and her ex-husband’s sexual abuse, which she had struggled with for years.

In Study 2, some participants reported changes in their life philosophy: they developed a clearer sense of identity; learned to be more self-reliant and self-assured; started re-prioritizing family/children while embarking on new career directions; developed greater insights and wisdom into why their marriage failed; and increased their sense of spiritual connection. Both Rajiv and Susan reported that the strengthening of
religious and/or spiritual growth and the existential search for deeper meaning and purpose in life had contributed to their post-divorce adjustment.

According to Calhoun & Tedeschi (1998, 2002), the development of post-traumatic growth is gradual. Therefore, interventions recommended by the divorcees as well as the counsellors might require time and effort before visible growth and perceived benefits are experienced. The interventions that brought about post-divorce growth for Gopal were accepting the reality of the divorce and learning to deal with the uncertainties of the future. These helped him to regain a more confident and self-assured disposition. This was similar to Susan who said that coming to terms with her divorce quickly; learning from the divorce experience, and taking joint responsibility with her ex-spouse for the marriage dissolution had brought about personal growth for her. Betty described an increased appreciation for emotional distancing herself from her ex-spouse and adopting a change in the philosophy of life. This helped her to gain another perspective of life which in turn allowed her to analyse the marital issues dispassionately. Nine women and three men were able to reflect on the importance of having the personal strength to close an unhappy episode in their lives and making a fresh start. In a similar vein, many counsellors believed that in order to heal, divorcees need to find their own closure and start afresh, particularly with things connected to past trauma. This is in alignment with Calhoun & Tedechi (1998) who suggested that post-traumatic growth arises as a result of the rumination and restructuring that take place in the weeks, months and even years following the trauma.

7.9.4: Post-divorce Growth: Counsellors’ Perspectives

The counsellors in Study 3 believed that counselling can play a central role in guiding clients into post-divorce growth. Divorcees can be helped to adjust to the aftermath of post-divorce. They suggested ways to strengthen their clients’ parenting role,
and exit or disengage negative and baggage-laden roles such as the “ex-spouse” or the “ex-mother-in-law”. They added that such effective interventions would help divorcees gain new emotional and psychological perspectives on the dynamics that weakened their marriage. This hastens their recovery and can facilitate growth. A few counsellors suggested that counselling sessions could assist in re-defining concepts more positively. For example, “loss of the marriage” does not necessarily mean the loss of the family or the loss of one’s self-identity. A counsellor who has more than 35 years of counselling experience with couples and families shared that if counsellors could effectively intervene in this area, the emotional, psychological and economic distancing would help divorcees recover. Divorcees can begin to accept that the union was artificially kept together for family, social or religious reasons. These conceptual issues can be addressed in either a structured or unstructured manner, using the composition of the group or individual work to broaden perspectives. Other work could include re-framing to enable divorced individuals to alter their view of different aspects of their situation. This suggestion for speedier acceptance is a strategy that counsellors can offer their clients to help in post-divorce growth.

A few counsellors said that “self-development” programmes can be designed to help divorcees embark on a journey of self-discovery. This way they can use the enhanced self-awareness to consciously create a new way of living for themselves. Given that for some, the spiritual aspect is a critical part of their journey, certain groups, could incorporate both spiritual and secular aspects. The ultimate goals of the divorce support group would be to develop deep personal insight, a clear sense of identity and a robust self-esteem. The need to repair self-esteem was highlighted by some participants in Study 2 who reported that their self-esteem was damaged in the course of their gruelling marriages and the post-divorce period. Therefore, the counsellors suggested that in the formulation
of a treatment plan, structured and non-traumatising exercises can be incorporated to get divorcees to re-write their “scripts”. This may help them articulate and develop their dreams and goals for the future.

Linley & Joseph (2004) suggested that therapists and counsellors may find fertile ground in exploring the positive qualities mentioned by the divorcees, as well as using them as the foundation for therapeutic work. Therefore, based on the present data, it would be useful for counsellors to help their divorced clients to focus on (a) making sense of, and finding meaning in, what happened during the pre- and post-divorce period; (b) developing insights of themselves post-divorce; (c) using positive gains to heal self; and, (d) developing the confidence that post-divorce negative outcomes are not insurmountable and that it can give rise to potential growth. When focusing on the possibility of post-divorce growth, the counsellors in guiding the clients could focus on four critical points for intervention: (a) pre-marriage preparation; (b) when marital problems surface; (c) when divorce is being contemplated; and, (d) during the post-divorce adjustment phase.

7.10: Methodological Considerations and Recommendations for Further Research

This is the first investigation of divorce in Singapore that seeks to learn about the whole divorce experience, ranging from the causes of divorce, outcomes, adjustment process to possible interventions and post-divorce growth, from the multiple perspectives of the divorcees and experienced divorce counsellors. It is also the first time that three separate studies have been conducted to explore common research questions related to divorce in Singapore within a single research project. The integration of quantitative and qualitative research methods, through the employment of a structured questionnaire survey and face-to-face semi-structured interviews with both divorcees and counsellors, enabled a
cross-linking and triangulation of data to strengthen the validity of the research findings, and thereby enriched the breadth and depth of understanding of the divorce experience. For instance, the positive and negative outcomes, factors and indicators could only be discovered through the relatively free-flowing exploration with interviewees in the qualitative study while assessment of tangible improvement in adjustments over time was more effectively achieved through quantitative analysis. This again proves the strength of using combined research methods which offers more synergy between the rigour of quantitative analysis and the more in-depth qualitative analysis of themes that might throw more light on the whole divorce experience from trauma to recovery and growth.

Specific and authentic information was made available through the different dialogues with interviewees, both in accounting for the process and factors that led to the break-up of their marriages, as well as the process of adjustment and recovery that is influenced by the local environment. This is the strength of the current research study as prior to this research such information was not available. The discourse with experienced counsellors as an additional resource enabled the researcher to gain better and more unbiased insights into the divorce process and experience thereby strengthening the intellectual and instructive value of the research findings. The counsellors contributed to the rigour and richness of the studies through their objective accounts and evaluations of a wider group of divorcees’ experiences. Throughout the reports on the many factors and themes identified in Study 1 and 2, the researcher has attempted to give a flavour of the authentic voices of the divorcees and counsellors through excerpts of their unedited interviews to illustrate the different themes.

As a cosmopolitan society with three major ethnic Asian cultures, marriages in Singapore exist both within and across ethnic groups and social strata. Consequently, divorce experiences in Singapore may be more varied and socially complex as traditions
and familiar perceptions are traced back to various ethnic origins, religions, cultures, values, belief systems and social mores. Therefore, one of the limitations of this research is that in Study 1, the sample was primarily of Christian marriages and there was little representation of other religious groups. The situation was somewhat similar in Study 2, with only one Hindu and two Muslim marriages. As the sample size studied is equivalent to about 2% of the 2008 divorces in Singapore, the researcher had to ensure statistical significance when attempting investigations into sub-clusters within the sample; thus detailed investigation within racial and cultural sub-groups was not possible. Further research is needed, therefore, to explore differences across cultural and religious groups to make the conclusions more immediately applicable to a wider population. The existence of two separate bodies of law for non-Muslim and Muslim divorces, the latter being administered by the Syariah Court under the Administration of Muslim Law Act, also complicates the study, especially when it comes to circumstances surrounding marital dissolution and divorcees’ adjustment patterns.

Apart from the need to broaden the sample to include more diversity, there are a number of directions for future research. There remains a strong need for longitudinal research to explore reasons for divorce and make comparison of divorce experiences of couples whose divorces were conducted under civil law and Muslim law respectively. In addition, there is a need for better documentation of marital development over time, involving (a) homogeneous samples from each of the ethnic groups - Chinese, Malays and Indians; (b) longitudinal designs reflecting indicators for divorce over time; (c) data that reflect age, sex, income, period from the divorce decision till the actual filing for divorce, and duration effects; (d) transitions from pre-marriage to post-divorce adjustment; and, (e) a further examination of predisposing and precipitating factors.
7.11: Conclusion

This research yielded a wealth of findings on the Singapore divorce experience. The data obtained form divorcee samples reveal that the causes of marriage dissolution extend beyond officially-stated reasons. Indeed, a range of other causes of marriage break-ups, along with the many underlying factors that germinated the idea of divorce, were identified. The research also made clear comparisons between the negative vis-à-vis positive post-divorce adjustment coping strategies adopted by divorcees and highlighted the possibility of attaining positive outcomes and post-divorce growth. Following this research confirmed the understanding that after dealing with the pain and hurt of a divorce, it is possible for divorcees to adjust positively and achieve post-divorce growth. Arising from this focus, it is hoped that the findings will provide counsellors with some insight in working with clients through the four critical points: (a) pre-marriage preparation; (b) when marital problems surface; (c) when divorce is being contemplated; and, (d) during the post-divorce adjustment phase.

Counselling emerged as an important resource that can potentially provide effective support for divorcees who are struggling through the immediate recovery process following a divorce. This appears especially helpful as an extended area of support and resource for those divorcees who do not have strong family support. Besides providing professional help to avoid negative adjustments, counselling can offer therapeutic relief to those feeling distressed, anxious and lost during the difficult transitional periods. The changed life-styles of divorcees necessitate information and skills-training that address issues such as finance, employment, self-esteem, and single-parenthood. These are important assets as they will help the divorsee transit into his or her “new” existence. This approach is in alignment with Richardson’s (2002) recommendation to study individuals
who are able to adjust and grow through the divorce experience. It was also suggested that identifying and teaching relevant skills will enable more people to grow post-divorce.

The focus on counselling interventions is undoubtedly important and the interventions suggested by counsellors earlier in this section each has their own merit. However, the issue remains that relatively few couples experiencing marital distress see a marriage counsellor. Factors noted earlier include the perceived stigma of appearing to need such counselling and the tendency to see counselling as a last resort. There is also the factor of cost, as many professional counselling services are privately run. The researcher feels that the answer may lie in more public education on the one hand to build awareness on how counselling at the appropriate time could help save marriages, and more public funding to assist those who decide to seek such counselling. The provision of public subsidies for those who seek marital counselling at the four stages identified could be administered through a means test like those already in place for other public services such as, health, education and public housing, except that subsidy be extended to private counselling organisations to alleviate the strain on state-run and supported agencies.

Public education programmes could be implemented in Singapore upper secondary school and junior colleges to stress the importance of building a strong family life after marriage, and the avenues for counselling as interventions at the pre-marital stages and when cracks begin to surface in the marriage. The second part of public education could be an on-going media advertising campaign to promote awareness of seeking counselling when divorce is being contemplated and to help with adjustment after divorce.

Finally, it is hoped that this seminal research will contribute to a better understanding of the issues of marriage and divorce in Singapore. Perhaps this study can be one of the bases from which counsellors and policy-makers draw insights into the
complex phenomenon of divorce and help arrest the upward trends of divorce in the city-state of Singapore.
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APPENDICES
A) Participant’s Profile

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<th>Variable</th>
<th>Participant’s Profile</th>
<th>Ex-Spouse’s Profile</th>
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<td>2. Age</td>
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<td>3. Occupation</td>
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<td>4. Race</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Religion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Highest Education Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Average Monthly Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Type of Housing: ________________________________

(e.g. 3/4/5 Room HDB Flat, Executive, Private Apartment, Terrace House, etc.)

9. Number of Children: __________________________

10. Age of Children: ______________________________

11. Period between making decision to divorce and actual divorce

   (approximate duration): _____________ years _____________ months

12. Date of Marriage: ____________________________

13. Date of Divorce: _____________________________

* Please delete accordingly
B) Indicators of Marital Instability

When you were contemplating divorce, what were some indicators that signalled to you that the divorce was most likely inevitable?

Please tick the relevant boxes. You may tick more than one box. Also include any other indicators that are not presented below.

**List of Indicators**

- frequent quarrels
- verbal and emotional abuse
- assault
- nagging/complaining
- inadequate maintenance
- financial problem
- personality differences e.g., incompatibility; different interest
- indifference
- lack of communication
- high levels of irritability in the presence of spouse
- infrequent sexual intercourse (Lack of intimacy)
- long periods of absence by spouse from the marital home (includes returning home late)
- isolation from spouse’s social circle
- loss of romantic love
- loss of trust
- jealousy
- imprisonment / gambling / alcoholism / drugs
- irresponsibility
- unreasonable behaviour
- others (please specify below)

---

i) **Main Indicator**

Please state the main indicator leading to the actual divorce:


---

ii) **Specific Personal Example/Event**

Please provide one (1) specific personal example/event to illustrate the main indicator:


---
C) Post-Divorce Adjustments

In your opinion, how well did you adjust to your divorce?
(Please circle number accordingly.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Still trying to adjust</td>
<td>Well adjusted</td>
<td>Very well adjusted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Review your personal experience, and tick the relevant boxes that best describe what you experienced:

i) after you have filed for divorce (separation)
ii) in the first six months after the divorce
iii) six months and longer after the divorce
You may tick more than one box and list any other symptom(s) that you experienced that is not presented in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feelings Experienced / Behaviours / Thoughts / Others</th>
<th>After you have filed for divorce (separation)</th>
<th>First 6 months after the divorce</th>
<th>6 months or longer after the divorce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feelings</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tense</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restless</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grieving</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopeless and helpless</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lethargic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moody (Mood Swings)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thoughts</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking that you cannot cope</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having the same worrisome thought repeatedly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a negative view of yourself</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a negative view of the world</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking you cannot make decisions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruminating over events leading up to divorce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behaviours</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting in an agitated way</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting in an aggressive way</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting in an abusive way</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawing from others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in self-harm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going on compulsive shopping sprees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in maintaining daily routine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in concentrating on the task at hand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in planning ahead</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings Experienced / Behaviours / Thoughts / Others</td>
<td>After you have filed for divorce (separation)</td>
<td>First 6 months after the divorce</td>
<td>6 months or longer after the divorce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Misusing of Substances</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please tick the relevant substance(s):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Alcohol</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Cigarettes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Medication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiencing Sleeplessness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please tick the relevant experience(s):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Disrupted sleep</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Unable to fall into sleep</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Unable to maintain sleep</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Changing Eating Patterns</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please tick the relevant experience(s):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Frequent binging</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Loss of appetite</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Taking in high caloric food excessively (e.g. snacks and desserts)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Others</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased susceptibility to illnesses (e.g., getting the flu)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of interest in past activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please state any other behavioural/ emotional symptom(s) or thoughts that you experienced/had that are not listed in the table above:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Other Experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
D) Positive Divorce Outcomes

Were there any positive outcomes brought to your life following the divorce?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Not sure

If yes, how soon after the divorce did you experience these positive outcomes?

- [ ] Months
- [ ] Years
- [ ] Not sure

Please proceed to answer the list of positive outcomes below if you have experienced positive outcomes after the divorce. Please tick the relevant boxes. You may tick more than one box. Also include any other positive outcomes that are not listed below.

**List of Positive Outcomes**
- [ ] greater independence
- [ ] feeling happier and being at ease
- [ ] peace and quiet gained
- [ ] no longer afraid
- [ ] no longer ashamed
- [ ] no more quarrelling
- [ ] find love again
- [ ] financial freedom
- [ ] having a more positive outlook towards life

- [ ] ________________
- [ ] ________________

Please state one (1) positive outcome that is important for a divorced person to work towards during the separation and after the divorce. Illustrate this positive aspect with a personal account.

i) **Personal Account of Positive Outcome:** ________________
E) Factors Contributing to Positive Adjustments

In your opinion, what were some factors that contributed to the positive outcomes that you experienced during and after the divorce?

_____________________________________________________________________

Please tick as many factors from the list below and include any other factors that are not presented below.

List of Factors

Self

☐ not viewing divorce as personal failure
☐ being relatively young at the time of divorce
☐ being female rather than male
☐ having a high level of education
☐ having strong religious belief(s)
☐ having personality factors such as resourcefulness; sense of control

Time

☐ having a shorter duration of marriage
☐ having a longer decision period prior the divorce

Relationship

☐ having a positive relationship with ex-spouse
☐ having supportive peers and family members
☐ having a new relationship
☐ having a low-level of attachment to ex-spouse

Pre-Post-divorce Experience

☐ being the initiator of the divorce
☐ coming from an abusive marriage
☐ having undergone an agreeable divorce settlement
☐ having sufficient income after the divorce
☐ having non-traditional gender role (e.g. wife is not dependant on husband for financial support)

Non-specific

☐ having moved out of marital home
☐ having access to counselling services or therapy
☐ others (please specify) __________________________________________

Please select one (1) factor stated in Part E, and provide a personal account to illustrate it

Personal Account: __________________________________________
F) Interventions for Troubled Marriages

In your view, were there any interventions that could have been taken to save your marriage?

Yes ☐  No ☐  Not Sure ☐

If yes, please tick any of the interventions that you perceive could have saved your marriage. You may tick more than one box.

☐ seek marital counselling
☐ improve communication and dialogue
☐ discuss money concerns openly
☐ get along with in-laws
☐ be less controlling and imposing
☐ be supportive and respectful
☐ turn down invitations that can lead to misunderstandings
☐ have regular couple outings and vacations
☐ discuss parenting styles with the goal of being effective parents
☐ remember important occasions (birthdays, anniversaries etc)
☐ attend courses and seminars on relationships
☐ discuss sexual issues openly
☐ learn to be more accepting in managing differences
☐ reduce stress at work and at home
☐ learn to balance work and family life
☐ avoid arguing over trivial matters (e.g. teacups left unwashed)
☐ others: (please specify)

______________________________________________________________

Please select any two (2) interventions you have chosen and provide reasons for your choice.

i) **Intervention 1:** _____________________________________________

   **Reason(s):** ________________________________________________

ii) **Intervention 2:** ___________________________________________

    **Reason(s):** ______________________________________________
G) Post Traumatic Growth Inventory

Please indicate the degree to which you experienced the changes below as a result of your divorce:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Very small degree</th>
<th>A small degree</th>
<th>A moderate degree</th>
<th>A great degree</th>
<th>A very great degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>My priorities about what is important in life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>An appreciation for the value of my own life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I developed new interests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A feeling of self-reliance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A better understanding of philosophical matters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Knowing that I can count on people in times of trouble</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I established a new path for my life</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>A sense of closeness with others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>A willingness to express my emotions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Knowing that I can handle difficulties</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I’m able to do better things with my life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Being able to accept the way things work out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Appreciating each day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>New opportunities are available which wouldn’t have been otherwise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Having compassion for others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Putting effort into my relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>I’m more likely to change things which need changing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>I have a stronger religious faith</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>I discovered that I was stronger than I thought I was</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I learned a great deal about how wonderful people are</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>I accept needing others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from: Tedesci Q Calhoun (1996)
H) Remarks/Comments

Please state any comments that you would like to make about the research topic or this questionnaire.

__________________________________________________________________

Thank you for participating in this survey.
FACT SHEET (for Study 1)

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE ON POST-DIVORCE ADJUSTMENTS

I) Purpose of Survey

Thank you for your interest in this study. This survey is conducted by Jessica Lai Cheng Chan-Leong for her doctoral thesis on post-divorce adjustments under the Swinburne University of Technology.

The findings of the research will assist counsellors and mental health professionals help divorcees adjust and arrive at positive outcomes. In summary, the research seeks to investigate the following:

1. how divorcees in Singapore adjust after a divorce;
2. positive post-divorce outcomes experienced by Singaporeans;
3. factors contributing to positive post-divorce adjustments; and
4. interventions for preventing a divorce.

II) Confidentiality

Information is gathered on an anonymous basis and your identity will not be disclosed under any circumstances. Data will be presented on a collated basis and the survey form will be destroyed upon completion of this study. Your responses will be entirely confidential.

III) Supervision

The research is undertaken under supervision and the under-mentioned supervisors are available if you need more information about the research project. They are:

1. Prof Glen Bates (Email: gbates@swin.edu.au);
2. Prof Goh Lee Gan (Email: cofgohlg@nus.edu.sg); and
3. Prof Tan Chue Tin (Email: chuetin@starhub.net.sg)

IV) Instructions

You will take approximately half an hour to complete this questionnaire.

Please return the completed questionnaire, via email to my supervisor at gbates@swin.edu.au or to the investigator at the following address or

Jessica Lai Cheng Chan-Leong
451 Joo Chiat Road
#02-07 Katong Junction
Singapore 427664
V) Enquiries

If you require any information please contact Jessica Lai Cheng Chan-Leong on (65) 62420868 or through my supervisor, Prof Glen Bates (03) 92148100 if you have queries regarding the research.

VI) Concerns/Complaints about the Research Project

If you have any concerns/complaints about the conduct of this project, please contact Swinburne’s Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC):

Research Ethics Officer
Swinburne Research (H68)
Swinburne University of Technology, P O Box 218, HAWTHORN VIC 3122, Australia
Tel (03) 9214 5218 or +61 3 9214 5218 or resethics@swin.edu.au

Consent For Survey On Post-Divorce Adjustment

1) I consent to participate in the survey named above. I have been provided sufficient information and this consent form and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

2) Please tick your response below:

☐ Yes, I voluntarily choose to participate in this survey on post-divorce adjustment

☐ No, I do not wish to participate in this study

3) I acknowledge that:

• the possible side effects have been explained to me to my satisfaction;
• my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the survey at anytime without explanation;
• the study is for the purpose of research and not for profit;
• any personal or health information about me which is gathered in the course of and as the result of my participating in this study will be (i) collected and retained for the purpose of this study and (ii) accessed and analysed by the researcher(s) for the purpose of conducting this study;
• my anonymity is preserved and I will not be identified in any publications from the research.

By signing this document I agree to participate in this survey.

Name of Participant: _______________________________________________

Signature: _________________________________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________________________
APPENDIX C

INFORMATION SHEET (for Study 2)

To: All Participants

Semi-structured Interviews for Doctoral Thesis

I) Purpose of Interview

I am conducting interviews with divorcees in Singapore as part of my doctoral thesis on post-divorce adjustment to divorce through Swinburne University of Technology. The findings of the research will assist counsellors and mental health professionals to help divorcees adjust and arrive at positive outcomes. In summary, the research seeks to investigate the following:

1. how divorcees in Singapore adjust after a divorce;
2. positive post-divorce outcomes experienced by Singaporeans;
3. factors contributing to positive post-divorce adjustments; and
4. interventions for salvaging troubled marriages.

II) Confidentiality

Information is gathered on an anonymous basis and the identity of the participant will not be disclosed under any circumstances. Data from the interviews will be presented on a collated basis and the data transcribed for thematic analysis will be destroyed upon completion of this study. Responses will be entirely confidential.

III) Supervision

The research is undertaken under supervision and the under-mentioned supervisors are available if you need more information about the research project. They are:

1. Prof Glen Bates (Email: gbates@swin.edu.au);
2. Prof Goh Lee Gan (Email: cofgohlg@nus.edu.sg); and
3. Prof Tan Chue Tin (Email: chuetin@starhub.net.sg)
IV) Instructions

As a participant you will be invited to do the following:

1) A series of short questions, on your divorce experience and ways of coping will be discussed with you and it is anticipated that it will take no longer than 90 minutes;

2) it is possible that some participants may experience distress while relating their experiences and every care will be taken to conduct the interview with sensitivity. Appropriate referral to obtain support will be made available to anyone experiencing distress. Your participation in this project is voluntary. Your initial agreement to participate does not stop you from discontinuing participation and you are free to withdraw at any stage; and

3) the interview will be audio-taped and it will be transcribed.

V) Inquiries

Any questions regarding the project on “Post-divorce Adjustment” can be directed to Prof Glen Bates of the School of Life Sciences, Swinburne University of Technology on Telephone Number 019-613-92148100 and Email: gbates@swin.edu.au.
CONSENT FORM FOR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW (for Study 2)

Swinburne University of Technology
Project Title: Post-divorce Adjustment
Principal Investigator: Jessica Lai Cheng Chan-Leong

1) I consent to participate in the interview named above. I have been provided a copy of the project information statement and this consent form and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

2) Please tick your response to the following:

- I agree to be interviewed by the researcher
- I agree to allow the interview to be recorded by electronic device (audio-tape recorder)
- I agree to make myself available for further information if required

3) I acknowledge that:

- my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the interview at anytime without explanation;
- the study is for the purpose of research and not for profit or part of therapeutic intervention;
- any personal or health information about me which is gathered in the course of and as the result of my participating in this study will be (i) collected and retained for the purpose of this study and (ii) accessed and analysed by the researcher(s) for the purpose of conducting this study;
- my anonymity is preserved and I will not be identified in publications emanating from the research

4) Concerns/Complaints about the Research Project

If you have any concerns/complaints about the conduct of this project, please contact Swinburne’s Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC):

Research Ethics Officer
Swinburne Research (H68)
Swinburne University of Technology, P O Box 218, HAWTHORN VIC 3122, Australia
Tel (03) 9214 5218 or +61 3 9214 5218 or resethics@swin.edu.au

By signing this document I agree to participate in this study.

Name of Participant: ____________________________________________
Signature: _________________________________________________
Date: ______________________________________________________
APPENDIX E

FACT SHEET (for Study 3)

To: All Counsellors and Counselling Interns

Semi-structured Interviews for Doctoral Thesis

I) Purpose of Interview

I wish to inform you that I will be conducting interviews with divorcees in Singapore as part of my doctoral thesis on post-divorce adjustments under the Swinburne University of Technology.

The findings of the research will assist counsellors and mental health professionals help divorcees adjust and arrive at positive outcomes. In summary, the research seeks to investigate the following:

1. how divorcees in Singapore adjust after a divorce;
2. positive post-divorce outcomes experienced by Singaporeans;
3. factors contributing to positive post-divorce adjustments; and
4. interventions for salvaging troubled marriages.

II) Confidentiality

Information is gathered on an anonymous basis and the identity of the participant will not be disclosed under any circumstances. Data will be presented on a collated basis and the data transcribed for thematic analysis will be destroyed upon completion of this study. Their responses will be entirely confidential.

III) Supervision

The research is undertaken under supervision and the under-mentioned supervisors are available if you need more information about the research project. They are:

1. Prof Glen Bates (Email: gbates@swin.edu.au);
2. Prof Goh Lee Gan (Email: cofgohl@nus.edu.sg); and
3. Prof Tan Chue Tin (Email: chuetin@starhub.net.sg)

IV) Instructions

The interview will take approximately 90 minutes.
Please ring me at Tel: 98177311 or through E-mail via my supervisor gbates@swin.edu.au or write to me at the following address:

Jessica Lai Cheng Chan-Leong  
451 Joo Chiat Road  
#02-07 Katong Junction  
Singapore 427664

V) Enquiries

If you require any information please contact Jessica Lai Cheng Chan-Leong at Tel: 98177311 or Prof Glen Bates at Tel: 019-613-92148100.

VI) Concerns/Complaints about the Research Project

If you have any concerns/complaints about the conduct of this project, please contact Swinburne’s Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC):

Research Ethics Officer  
Swinburne Research (H68)  
Swinburne University of Technology, P O Box 218, HAWTHORN VIC 3122, Australia  
Tel (03) 9214 5218 or +61 3 9214 5218 or resethics@swin.edu.au

VII) Help Needed

Would you have anyone that you are aware of that might be interested in participating in the interview? If you are willing to help in advertising the research to suitable clients I will visit you and go through the interview with you in person so that you are clear on the requirements of the project for your client.

In particular, it is very important that you feel the divorcee is psychologically and emotionally ready to visit the divorce experience again in a research interview. They must also be clear that their participation is voluntary and is in no way linked to their eligibility to receive counselling from you.

In addition, the participant would need to be willing to give consent for the interviewing session to be audio-taped and the only person having access to the audio-tape will be the researcher and the primary supervisor. The audio-tape will be kept in safe-keeping until the research project is over. All audio-tapes will be destroyed after the award of the PhD degree. The participant also has the right to withdraw from the interview at any time. While the research interview is in no way linked to counselling, the interviewer will assist in offering appropriate referrals if the client so wishes and can give feedback to you as the counsellor if the client so wishes. As I am conducting the research I will not be involved in any therapeutic work with interviewees.

Thank you.

Jessica Lai Cheng Chan-Leong  
PhD Candidate
CONSENT FORM FOR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW (for Study 3)

Swinburne University of Technology
Project Title: Post-divorce Adjustment
Principal Investigator: Jessica Lai Cheng Chan-Leong

1) I consent to participate in the interview named above. I have been provided a copy of the project information statement and this consent form and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

2) Please tick your response to the following:

- I agree to be interviewed by the researcher
  - Yes ☐ No ☐
- I agree to allow the interview to be recorded by electronic device (audio-tape recorder)
  - Yes ☐ No ☐
- I agree to make myself available for further information if required
  - Yes ☐ No ☐

3) I acknowledge that:

- my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the interview at anytime without explanation;
- the study is for the purpose of research and not for profit;
- any personal or health information about me which is gathered in the course of and as the result of my participating in this study will be (i) collected and retained for the purpose of this study and (ii) accessed and analysed by the researcher(s) for the purpose of conducting this study;
- my anonymity is preserved and I will not be identified in publications emanating from the research.

4) Concerns/Complaints about the Research Project

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By signing this document I agree to participate in this study.

Name of Participant: _______________________________________________
Signature: _________________________________________________________
Date: _____________________________________________________________