



SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND SOCIETAL BEHAVIOUR RESPONSES: EXPERIENCING THE PLIGHT OF WIDOWS IN JAMMU CITY

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ABSTRACT Despite rapid advances in the standard of living among people worldwide, the condition of few sections of our population still remains vulnerable, especially, that of widows and divorced women. Death of the spouse, or separation (legal or otherwise), appears to affect both the sexes in different ways and the psychological effect of these events is immense especially among females, who are dependable on their partners. They are vulnerably absent from the statistics of many developing countries, and they are rarely mentioned in the multitude of reports on women's poverty, development, health or human rights. Growing evidence of their sufferings, both socio economic and psychological, now challenges many conventional views and assumptions about this "invisible" group of women. The present study is focused on attitude by society and hardships faced by sample widows of urban Jammu, J&K state, India. The multiple sampling method was used to collect data among 50 selected widows from different regions of urban Jammu. Results revealed that most of the widows suffered negative response from society. Society considered them inauspicious. Even they faced hardships in living especially in economy.

KEYWORDS : widow, hardship, suffering, single mother

INTRODUCTION

Widowhood presents a myriad of economic, social and psychological problems, particularly in the first year or so after the death of the spouse. A major problem for both sexes is economic hardship. When the husband was the principal breadwinner, his widow is now deprived of his income and the nucleus of the family is destroyed (Fasoranti *et al.*, 2007). Many studies (e.g., Amoran *et al.*, 2005; Abdallah and Ogbeide, 2002) have concluded that a higher rate of mental illness exists among the widowed than their married counterparts. Another problem associated with widowhood is loneliness. Many widows live by themselves. They suffer the fear of being alone and loss of self-esteem as women, in addition to the many practical problems related to living alone. They feel the loss of personal contact and human association; therefore, they tend to withdraw and become unresponsive (Fasoranti *et al.*, 2007).

The greatest problem in widowhood is still emotional. Even if it had been a bad marriage, the survivor feels the loss. The role of spouse is lost, social life changes from couple-oriented to Individual oriented and the widowed no longer have the day-in, day-out companionship of the other spouse that had become an intrinsic part of their lives. People respond differently to loss and overcome grief in their own time. Frequently, the most difficult time for new widows is after the funeral (Scannell, 2003). Young widows often have no peer group. Compared to older widows, they are generally less prepared emotionally and practically to cope with the loss. Widowhood often causes financial stress because a major income source is lost with the death of a husband. The present study was focused to reveal personal experiences & hardships faced by sample widows in Jammu City.

The objectives of the Study

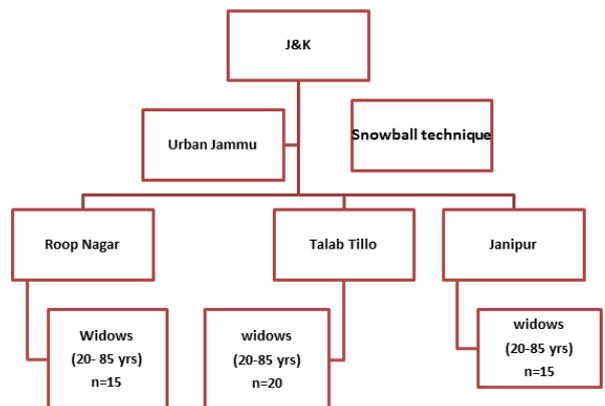
- To assess societal & attitudinal behaviour towards widows in & outside family.
- To articulate the experiences & hardships faced by sample widows in urban Jammu.

METHODOLOGY:

The present study was conducted in different zones of Jammu City. Fifty Hindu widows were selected for the study using snow ball technique. Field Survey was conducted to gather the relevant information.

Data was collected using semi-structured Questionnaire which included both open and close ended questions. In order to have a deep insight of the problem, the information was collected through open ended interviews. Moreover some Case Studies have been documented based on the data collected.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:



Result & Discussion

Based on data obtained & analysis the responses were tabulated in the form of tables & figures to obtain relevant result. The results were divided into two sections. Section 1 illustrates experiences & hardships faced by sample widows. This section also highlights why faces of societal behavior and attitude towards widow. Section 2 elaborates few case studies to understand the problems indepth.

Section 1

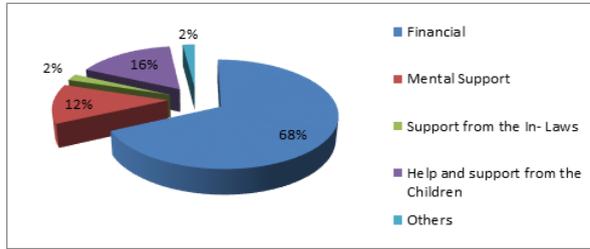
Table 1: Demographic Characteristics among sample women

Age	25-40 Years	40-55 Years	55-70 Years	70-85 Years
	20.4%	32.7%	30.6%	16.3%
Years of Being Widow	< 1 year	1-5 years	5-10 years	>10 years
	12.2%	38.8%	24.5%	24.5%
Cause of Death of Husband	Natural Death	Accidental	Suicide	Drug Abuse
	53.1%	42.9%	4.1%	-
No. of children	0	1-2	3	≥4
	4.1%	24.5%	36.7%	34.7%
Present live	Family	Independent	Old Age Home	
	91.8%	8.2%	-	

Table 1 describes Demographic characteristics among sample women. It was observed that maximum respondents were in age group of 40-55 years. Many respondents were facing this vulnerable period from 1-5 years. More than half of the respondent's husband's had natural Deaths

but few (4.1%) had also committed suicide. Except some (4.1%), all respondents had children. Most of the sample widows live in family. Some were living independently but none of the respondents were from old age home.

Figure 1: Illustration of Priority based needs among sample women



It was observed from fig. 1 that most of the sample women needed financial support to fulfill their basic needs. Many respondents reported mental support & peace of mind as also an important priority. Apart from this, many women considered a support from the children as a priority. Only few women prioritize need of support from the in laws & other assets of their husband.

Figure 2: Source of income among sample women

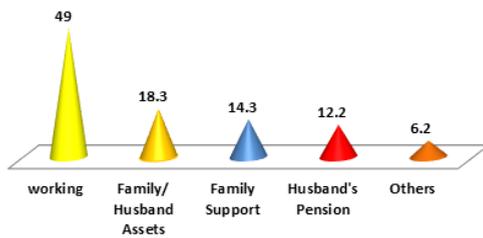


Fig 2 indicated that many sample women were working in private or government sector which was sole source of income for them. Some sample widows used family/ husband's assets to run their household. Nearly 12.2% of sample women were dependant on husband's pension. Few women were running their boutiques or doing small scale business to meet their both ends.

Table 2: Experiences faced by sample women

Problem	Yes	No
Are you able to live your own?	71.4%	28.6%
Do you experience problems in providing good food to your children.	79.6%	20.4%
Do you provide good clothes to your children?	77.6%	22.4%
Do you feel problems in meeting the expenditures on festivals/ cultural Interactions/ Social relations?	76.6%	23.4%
Are there any financial liabilities left by your husband?	20.4%	79.6%
Family response towards you: are you considered inauspicious/ isolated/ taunted?	75.5%	24.5%
Are you considered inauspicious on social occasions?	79.6%	20.4%
Have you ever experienced/ not allowed to participate in religious ceremonies?	69.4%	30.6%
Is society conservative on the issue of widow remarriage/ child marriage?	70%	30%
Have you ever experienced discrimination at your parental home?	38.8%	61.2%
Have you ever experienced discrimination at your in-laws home?	87.8%	12.2%
Are you allowed to interact with male visitors comfortably?	65.3%	34.7%
Do you face any problem to go for regular outdoor activities like marketing, paying bills, collecting basic household things?	81.5%	18.5%

Table 2 illustrates experiences or problems faced by sample women in their lives. It was observed that most of respondents were asked to live on their own, but few were not able to cope up with loneliness. Majority of respondents felt that they were not able to provide good

food & clothes to their kids. They had insufficient funds during festivals or cultures to spend of. Few women even reported that they have financial liabilities left by their husband which is not at all easy for them to accomplish. Most of women reported that they were considered inauspicious on cultural/ social occasions. Many respondents felt that our Indian society is still conservative in matters of widow remarriage/child remarriage. Some women even felt discrimination towards them in their in laws house, where as few felt discrimination even at their parents house.

Table 3: Attitude towards second marriage among sample women

Problem	Yes	No
Do you ever have been restrained from remarriage because society does not accept it?	57.2	42.8
Have you ever got proposal of remarriage?	67.4	32.6
You didn't remarry as you could not find a suitable partner?	40.9	59.1
You didn't remarry because of your children.	65.3	34.7
Is your family/ children supportive?	69.4	30.6
Do you feel abstained from remarriage as your children grown up or too old?	44.9	55.1
The problem of age prevented you from remarriage?	30.6	69.4
Accustomed to independence, fear of control by second husband and in laws prevented you for remarriage.	79.6	20.4
Do you worry about for your children/ grand children like their studies, career, society, marriage etc.	80	20
Do you feel financial matters/ child rearing/ old age or in your social life?	51	49
Are there any restrictions on color/ dress/ makeup/ food habits etc.	83.7	16.3

The table 3 reports attitude towards 2nd marriage among sample women. More than 57% woman felt that they have themselves restrained from remarriage because of the fear of Society, even after getting the proposal for partner for remarriage. Nearly half of the sample women didn't found a suitable partner. Majority of women denied for remarriage due to their children. Whereas the problem of age was found in 30.6% of the cases for not remarrying. Nearly all women worried about their children's career and life rather than their own marriage. There was always a restriction on the dress, colour, make-up and food habits on the sample widow which was depressing for them.

Section 2

Case Study-I

Neeru is working in a semi government sector and she got her husband's post in his office after his death, who committed suicide. She is living independently. Living alone was not her choice but her destiny. She was living with her in-laws before her husband died. After the death of her spouse the behavior of her in-laws towards her was not good. They considered her inauspicious. Even with regard to her married life she never had a good chemistry/ understanding with her husband, though being good looking and loyal, her husband was very skeptical and suspicious about her. The situation got so worse when her husband committed suicide. All the family members, relatives and neighbours were shocked and considered her prime reason for his husband's death. She never gave up and decided to live for her daughter and her own self. Now she is at the age of retirement but she is happy with the life. While talking to researcher she narrates "*Husband ki kami to koi bhi puri nahi kar sakta par kya kar sakte hain apne liye aur bachon ke liye jeena parta hai aur zindagi mein aage barna parta hai*" No one can replace husband but we cannot do anything, for one's ownself and also for the children one have to move ahead in life.

Case Study-II

Neetu Khajuria is 67 years old widow and have two sons; she got married at the age of 24. She was working with Social Welfare department at the time of her marriage. Initially she went to her in laws house where she had two unmarried sister-in-laws, older than her husband. She never shared a good relation with her Sister-in-laws. After the birth of her elder son, she shifted to a rental accommodation in Urban Jammu and had never been to her in-laws house. She was fed up with the day-to-day tussel. Although her husband was a Doctor but he was a chronic alcoholic too. After few years of marriage they were blessed with another son which only increased the family responsibility. Meanwhile her husband got promoted and transferred to another city. She nurtured her children and her husband supported

her financially alone. Though they purchased property for their children but apart from finance her husband never shared a cordial relation with her. Her husband died at the age of 53 due to multiple organ failure which was reward of being chronic alcoholic she herself retired as Deputy Director, Social Welfare Department. She educated her sons well and now her elder son is entrepreneur. Finance was never a problem for her but she has never gained a respectful social position. Her husband never gave her respect she deserved. Her sons also treated her as a provider only. While narrating her story to researcher, she expressed her feelings "*Mein to apne bachon ke liye bas ATM machine huin aur kuch bhi nahin*" - I am just an ATM machine for my Sons and nothing beyond that. She required a respectful life which she was always deprived off.

Case Study-III

Mrs. Vijaya is a widow of 52. At the age of 20 she got married to her maternal Uncle's son who was 29 years old. They had a shop of Arts and Craft. They were happily married and blessed with three children, two daughters and a son. All of them are married now. Her husband was very nice and polite with his wife but four years ago he died from tuberculosis, this was a great loss to the family especially to the respondent. Life became miserable for her. Somehow she brought up her children, gave them the basic education only. Her financial condition was not so good as a result she couldn't afford their higher education. Now her daughters are married to nearby places of Jammu region and her son is working with a private firm. She has five grand children. Her brother also comes to see her often and also helps her financially on occasions. She is receiving widow pension from the last two years, which she utilizes for buying medicines, household items etc. While talking to researcher she revealed that life was very difficult after the death of her husband, but now she realizes the worth of good siblings. She often blesses her brother who helped her in this cruel situation.

Case Study-IV

Mrs. Poonam is a 42 year old widow who resides with her in-laws. She had a son who is now 18 years old. Her husband died 3 years back due to sudden heart attack. As the husband was working in the bank, she got job in the same bank on a lower rank. Finance was never a problem for her after the death of her husband but she always faced mental stress and trauma. She was so attached to her husband that separation meant much for her. Her in-laws never supported her and felt that because of her bad destiny they lost their son. She never thought of second marriage as she loved her husband very much and her priority was his son. As her son is now in growing stage sometimes she worries that she spends most of her time in office and not able to spend quality time with her son. Her son is more attached to grandparents which makes her insecure. Her son abused her like her in-laws. Her Single purchase for herself is questionable in the family. All the other family members can laugh & watch T.V but she is alienated as she cannot spend a pleasurable time with other members of family. She is so restricted that she has no right to shut the door of her room for any reason. On festivals also she was secluded as an untouchable who cannot participate in any festival or social gatherings. She has been made socially excluded from all the sectors personally as well as socially.

Case Study-V

Mrs. Smridhi lost her husband in a road accident. She lives independently of her own. She is currently working in a private School to meet her requirements. She is a mother of a daughter and her daughter is grown up. She devotes her major time to her daughter and narrates that, "*Jab tak Iske Papa the, tab tak kabhi paision ki dikkat nahin hui, unke jane ke baad bari struggle hai, Aab to bas meri Beti hi meri zindagi hai ab mujhe uske liye jeena hai*" "When her father was alive we never faced any financial problems but after his death life has become a big struggle in life. While she was revealing her life's journey she discloses that her life became very hard especially in terms of money, without her husband. Many and most of the phases of life are very challenging but she is facing them and trying her level best to fight with them. She is not well educated and has to work hard for her living. According to her, Sometimes she feel very insecure about the future but her daughter is her encouragement to fight with the hardships of life.

Case Study-VI

Mrs. Seema lost her husband 3 years back due to severe hypoglycemic attack. She has one Son and two daughters. Her husband had a shop which she converted into a ladies boutique and a house in Bakshi

Nagar area where she is currently living with her children. Her daughters are very good at studies and her younger daughter scored 5th position in her 10th JKBOSE while her elder daughter score an open merit seat in engineering college of Jammu while her son is in eighth standard. Her kids are her life and now her aim in life is to settle them and make their future secure. While she was talking to researcher she revealed that "*aab to bas yahi chahiti huin ki bache ache se par likh jayen aur naukriyan Karen, aapne pairon pe khare hona bara zaroori hai aaj kal ke time mein*". Now I want my kids to study well and acquire jobs as it is very important to be financially secure these days. She is the only bread earner who is struggling and working hard for the bright future of her children and also financially secured old age for herself.

Case Study-VII

Anita was married at the age of 24 years. Her husband was working as a Security Guard in one of the private firms she is also working as a maid in a nearby School. Her husband was an alcoholic and diagnosed with liver cancer which resulted into his death. She lost him one year back and is survived with a daughter of six years and a son of five years. The kids are very small and depend upon their mother for their requirements. According to her "*beti samajdar hai, mera kehna bhi maan leti hai par beta bara shararti hai, vo usse bhi chota hai par baat baat mein zid karta hai*". Daughter is good and obedient too but the son who is younger to her is very naughty. She is also working in some of the households as the merger amount of rupees eighteen hundred which she is getting from the school is not enough to raise two kids and to feed them. By working in other two houses, she earn some more money so that she can meet her requirements. She had also applied for Widow pension some days back and as she is living in kutcha house moreover she also wanted to avail the benefits given by the Government to widows in the form of some cash who have their land but no pukka houses. Talking to the researcher she said "*jo kismet mein hona tha vo ho gaya aab mujhe aage dekhna hai, puri zindagi pari hai bache bhi abhi chote hain, aaj kaam karungi to kal thora behatar hoga nahin to roti khani bhi mushkil hai*". Whatever has written in destiny happened, now I have to look forward, whole life is in front of me to live and struggle, kids are very small, if I will today work then there will be a hope of better tomorrow otherwise to afford a meal is very difficult.

CONCLUSION

Widowhood is considerably meant to be a distressing event in the life of an individual, with associated psychological as well as social ramifications. These problems faced by the event are further compounded among women owing to particular social and cultural aspects, which lead to increase feelings of guilt, remorse and aloofness. There is also a tendency to reject depressive symptoms as something socially and culturally acceptable, whereas significant distress associated with these events could be harbingers of psychological illness often requiring attention rather preference. The present study was an attempt to document the plight of widows. This was also an effort to highlight positioning of Widows in the Society.

Widowhood has traditionally been dreaded in India, not only because it means a lowering of the status of any woman within the matrimonial home, but also because it is accompanied by several indignities. Widows in India must abstain from all non-vegetarian food, the staple of every meal in the region and restrict themselves to just one meal a day. They must give up wearing nice clothes and jewellery, and should wear a coarse white saree. They are not allowed to socialize, to attend weddings and celebrations, lest they bring ill-luck. In the past, widows' heads were shaven so that they don't look attractive. The idea was to keep a strict tab on their sexuality, so that they should never have the opportunity of remarrying. Even otherwise, remarriage was frowned upon, since it would entail a division of the family property. In urban India the notions have generally moved ahead in this respect, widows continue to be ill-treated within the family, especially in the small cities. Present study also documents mental stress among the widows. After husband financial support is what is mostly needed among them.

Widow remarriage may be forbidden in the higher castes; and remarriage, where permitted, may be restricted to a family member. Further, a widow, upon remarriage, may be required to relinquish custody of her children as well as any property rights she may have. If she keeps her children with her, she may fear they would be ill-treated in a second marriage. Indian widows are often regarded as "evil eyes," the purveyors of ill fortune and unwanted burdens on poor families

(UN Division for the Advancement of Women, 2000; Fuller, 1965).

Thousands of widows are disowned by their relatives and thrown out of their homes in the context of land and inheritance disputes. Their options, given a lack of education and training, are mostly limited to becoming exploited, unregulated, domestic labourers (often as house slaves within the husband's family), or turning to begging or prostitution (Bill I, 2006).

Being regarded as a marginal entity in society, the widow was socially differentiated by a prescribed behaviour which she has at all costs to follow. She was treated by the family and the rest of the society as inauspicious, unclean and polluting, and her marginality was enforced by all kinds of taboos. These degrading and demeaning restrictions were imposed on the unfortunate widows in the guise of upholding the ideal of dharma and renunciation. As stated above, she was not allowed to wear the clothes and her jewellery which she could wear in her married state. In some cases, her hair was shorn. Her tonsured head or flowing hair unadorned with flowers bespeaks her miserable status. No jewels adorn her nose and ears, no chains her neck, no bangles her wrists, no rings her toes. Clad simply in a cotton sari of prescribed colour, often without a blouse, she as a rule goes about barefoot. She was not permitted to partake in family meals, could only sleep on the ground and in all ways was kept separate from the active social world of the living. She is denied any opportunity for pleasure and enjoyments, including participation in social gatherings, festivals, and the partaking of rich food. Sad and sorrowful as the widow's plight generally was, it was natural that some superstitions and concepts were built round it. Though the time has changed many things but widows and widowhood is still a stigma in India. Single women struggle a lot in her life to provide even the basic necessities like food, shelter and education to her kids, which was also reported in present study.

The need of the hour is to create awareness among family as well as to the individual in general through various means of mass media. NGOs and other such self-help groups who come to the aid of such women should be appraised of the possibility of such entities so that proper attention and early intervention can be initiated. It would also be beneficial if women who themselves have undergone such an experience come forward to help others. This would serve the twin benefits of rehabilitating these women as well as providing the much needed care and support to the distressed among them.

An increasing need is being felt for more strict implementation of existing laws regarding women's right to the deceased husband's property and other belongings, pension benefits, alimony to divorced women, visitation rights (for women who do not have custody of their children) and laws regarding custody of children after divorce or after remarriage of a widow. In our country widows are deprived of getting pension schemes benefits due to corruption. They are facing numbers of problems in their life.

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