

Widowhood in Rural Setting: Problem's and Prospective

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ABSTRACT

Worldwide widow's population figure estimated at 245 million with half of them living in extremely poverty. (Loomba Foundation Report,2010). India is a country with second highest population of 42.4 million. If on the one hand, a woman is at the peak of ladder of success in many spheres of public life, on the other hand, she suffers a silent social death everyday bound by the customs and traditions in the orthodox Indian Society. They are culturally, socially, economically and politically excluded from the mainstream of the society. The process of urbanisation, modernisation and globalisation have led to changes in economic structure, erosion of societal values and the weakening of social institutions particularly the norms of the joint family. This has made worst the position of the widows in a family and once she becomes a 'burden' of the family, no time is lost to eject her from the family environment. This research is focused on socio-economic problems faced by widows in rural areas of Himachal Pradesh. Fifty widows of different age groups were selected with the help of random sampling method. Interview schedule and observation method were also used. It is revealed that widows' discrimination does not prevail across the nation. That is, this research did not deny the existence of traditional widows' discrimination in some areas, but demonstrated that this phenomenon does not represent the whole nation, if we focus on the urban areas.

Keywords: Widow, widowhood, deprivation, discrimination, joint family

Women in Patriarchy society has always been in a lower position and status. They have been facing discrimination, violence, and exclusion in some form or other. If in case a woman has become widow then their condition becomes even worse and vulnerable.

A woman who has lost her spouse and not remarried is called as widow. Women in general and widows in particular, have always been a subject matter of subjugation and discrimination since time immemorial. Widows' situation and status in society like India, where male dominancy prevails throughout the ages, is extremely miserable and women are always considered as a curse to the society. They have excluded or deprived not only from the family matters but also from societal ceremonies. Despite of rapid change in the world and the standard of living of people worldwide, the condition of women (particularly widow) still remains unchanged.

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It can be said that no group of the world is neglected than are widows. Widows are deliberately remaining outside the statistics of development scenario. They are rarely mentioned in the any of the reports of development in the last 20 years. Widows have always been looked upon in the social gatherings. They are considered as a curse for the mankind in orthodox Indian society.

Demographic picture of widowhood

Worldwide widow's population figure estimated at 245 million with half of them living in extremely poverty. (Loomba Foundation report, 2010). The countries with highest number of widows population is China with 43 million, India with second highest population of 42.4 million population and after that United nations with 13.6 million population. Widows have been looked upon at most social gatherings be it a marriage, child birth or house warming ceremonies in a bad manner. They are not permitted to give blessings even to their own newly married children as it is believed that these blessings will turn into curse and the newly married bride would also become widow.

Widows: throughout the ages

Position of Women and Widowhood during the Vedic Period

In that era, women were tied to their husbands in burning pyres and forced to death, a practice called 'SATI'. If a women undergoes sati, as she was worshipped Goddess, temples were built in her memory and it was believed that she would go directly to heaven and can be with their husbands forever. In Mahabharata there is an example of King Pandu that, after the death of king Pandu, his younger wife Madri commits sati. Another example was of Devaki, Bhadra, Rohini and Madira were burnt with King Vasudev corpse.

Status of Women and Widowhood in the Medieval India

Indian leader, Rammohan Roy (1772-1833) through his organization, Brahma Samaj was the first who fought to eliminate sati. Ishwarachandra Vidyasagar (1820-91) tried to legitimize the remarriage of Hindu widows on the basis of scriptural authority. In the twentieth century,

Dayanand and Mahatma Gandhi actually work a lot to stop the practice.

Status of Women and Widows in the Modern Era

Over the last few years there has been a high decibel noise for women's rights and against women inhumanity. Many constitutional safeguards are introduced from the last two or three decades by the Government of India against window discrimination but condition of window is still pitiable.

Objectives

- (a) To determine the social and cultural deprivation faced by widows;
- (b) To know the socio-economic problems of widows; and
- (c) To study the life of a woman before and after widowhood.

Methodology

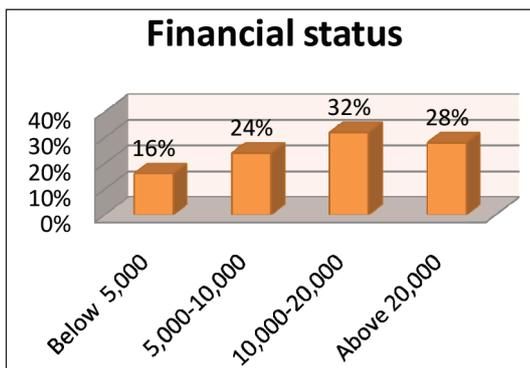
The study based on exploratory research design. Fifty widows were randomly interviewed from the two villages Bhoranj and Bassi villages of the Hamirpur District (Himachal Pradesh) with the help of semi-structured interview schedule. Observation technique is also used in the study. The study is based on the primary data, consisting of the responses received from the respondents to the interview schedule

Findings

Economic Deprivation

Overall Thirty two percent of the respondents mentioned that their financial condition was average but twenty eight percent of the respondents were having good financial problems as their sons were in government jobs and while twenty four percent of them were coming under the category of poor, their life was full of miseries and sorrows. Even out of fifty, sixteen percent of respondents were not able to maintain their livelihood satisfactory even for their basic needs they have to struggle.

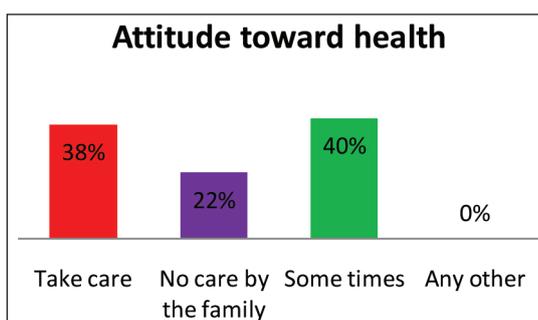
Sr.No.	Financial status	N	Percentage (%)
1	Below 5,000	08	16
2	5,000-10,000	12	24
3	10,000-20,000	16	32
4	Above 20,000	14	28
	Total	50	100



Psychological/Health Deprivation

Most of widows were facing psychological problems like tension, mental unrest, many times they find difficult to adjust to the changed environment, moreover when they were just being tolerated and were not being treated well in their family. The loneliness also makes them psychologically depressed and they persistently face such psychological problems as old age worries, emotional instability, lack of proper response etc.

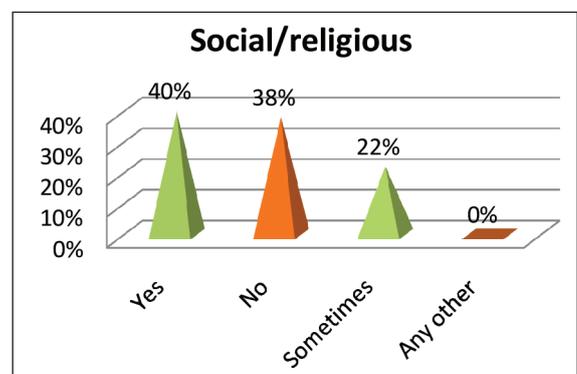
Sr. No	Attitude towards health	N	Percentage (%)
1	Take care	19	38
2	No care by the family	11	22
3	Some times	20	40
4	Any other	00	00
	Total	50	100



Social Deprivation

Overall, irrespective of age the widows opined that they were treated badly by the society but the emphasis was more with the younger. Majority of widows did not find any change in their children's behaviour. But few of the widows said that her son got married without her will, as there was no male member to check his activities. In the both age groups they faced many problems regarding their health. Old age widows were ignored by their family members and younger ones neglected their health because of their engagements in household works.

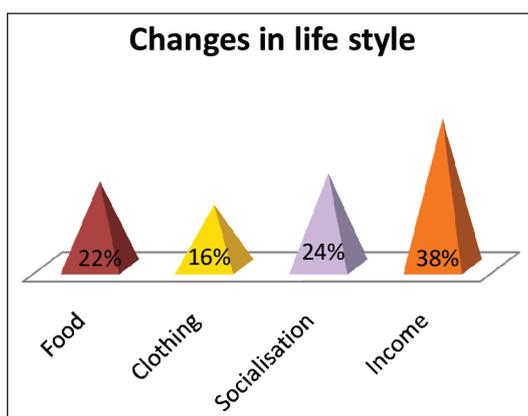
Sr.No	Social/religious	N	Percentage (%)
1	Yes	20	40
2	No	19	38
3	Sometimes	11	22
4	Any other	00	00
	Total	50	100



Cultural Deprivation

All the respondents have extreme faith in God and their Hindu Religion. After becoming widows they practiced many fasts, festivals throughout the year due to respect for Hindu religion. They have become purely vegetarian, started wearing white sarees and started attending religious programmes. According to them after their husband death, nobody was helping them except God.

Sr. No	Change in life style	N	Percentage (%)
1	Food	11	22
2	Clothing	08	16
3	Socialisation	12	24
4	Income	19	38
	Total	50	100

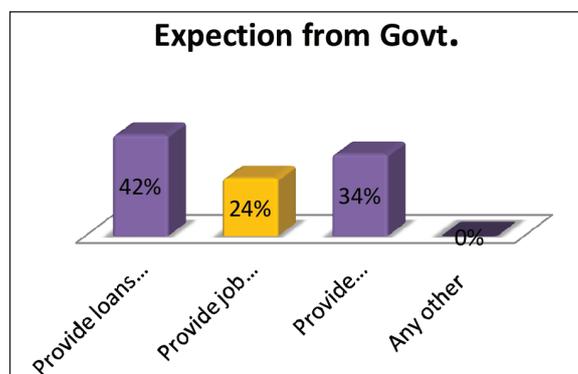


As per the question of remarriage all the widows gave the similar reason for not getting married again. But still the burden was greater with the younger widows who had to bring their children by educating them and getting them married. Few of the respondents also added that since they faced lot of difficulties in their first marriage they didn't want to marry again.

Expectations from the government for widows welfare

Overall, there were differences in the expectations from the government towards the welfare of widows. Widows who had attained widowhood after fifty years expressed that they expected the government to supply *Ration* similar to handicapped persons. But younger widows emphasized the government should give some loan and jobs for their survival.

Sr. No.	Expectation from Govt.	N	Percentage (%)
1	Provide loans with low interest	21	42
2	Provide job reservations	12	24
3	Provide adequate pension	17	34
4	Any other	00	00
	Total	50	100



Conclusion

The women interviewed in this study face similar issues to other women in their community, such as exclusion from health care and restrictions in their social mobility, but their status as widows make them particularly vulnerable. Moreover, widows' vulnerability especially during the early stages of their widowhood stems from an accumulation of challenges: limited resources, high levels of restrictions and responsibilities, and a lack of entitlements. Our study supports policy suggestions that have been proposed by others working in India, recommendations stemming from workshops and conferences that brought together activists, scholars, lawyers, and widows themselves. They advocated a multi-pronged approach that would simultaneously address material needs and social identity and respect. Family support is often insufficient to ensure an adequate living standard, there is a need to improve her (and her children's) material opportunities by securing women's property rights, expanding employment opportunities, and ensuring adequate social security benefits. So it can be concluded that there should be changes in the attitude of society towards widows and their widowhood through different sensitization programme by the intervention process of professional Social workers in family, school, college, community level etc. The people must develop positive view towards them and should treat them as human beings.

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