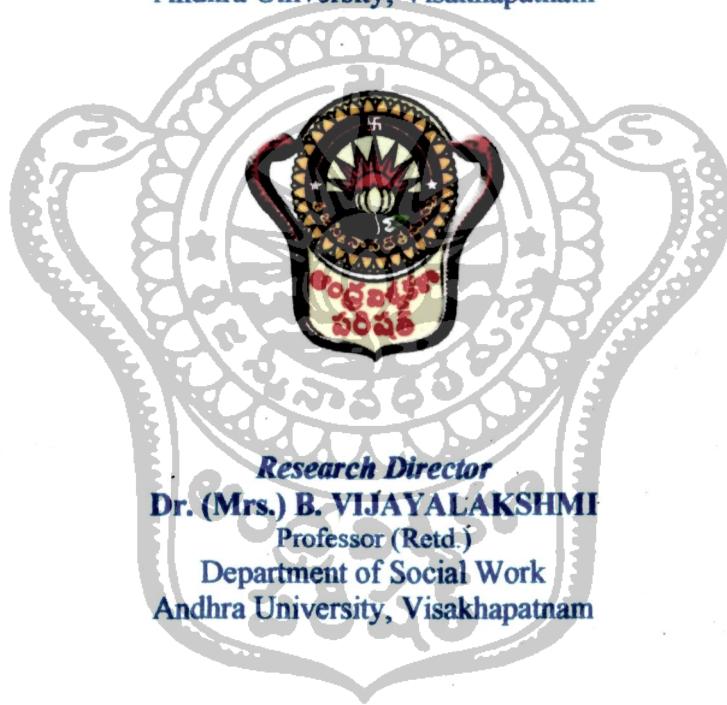


SINGLE WOMEN
A Study of Never-Married Working Women
in
Visakhapatnam City

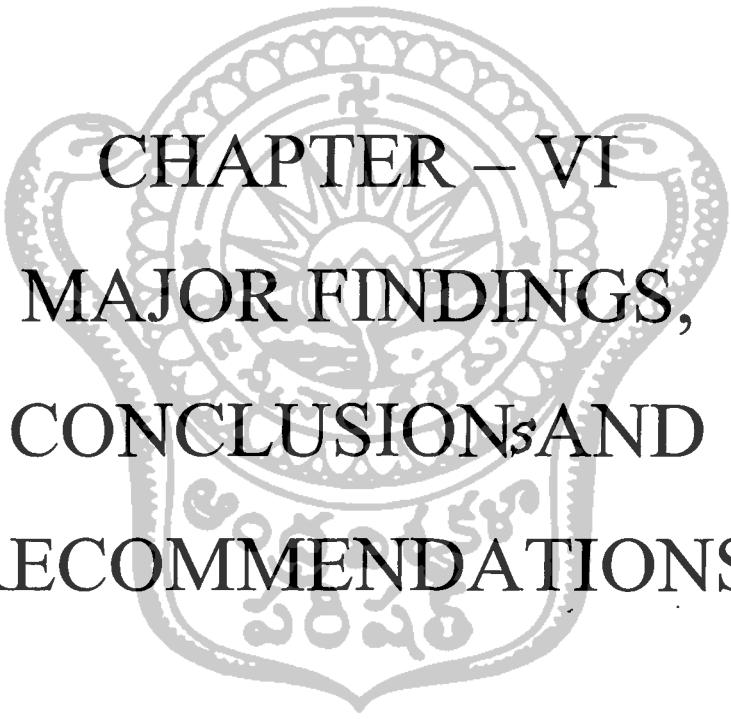
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CHAPTER – VI

MAJOR FINDINGS,

CONCLUSIONS AND

RECOMMENDATIONS



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MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study is taken-up in Visakhapatnam city to study Single Women (never-married working women) with reference to their demographic profile, economic status, reasons for being single, social participation, career, family relations, psychological problems, life satisfaction, leisure time activities, their future plans, and to elicit their suggestions. The main purpose of the study is exploratory in nature and aims at throwing light on the phenomenon of Singlehood and to understand the profile of never married working women.

The specific objectives of the present study are to:

- ⇒ examine the socio-demographic profile of the never-married working women
- ⇒ identify the problems of unmarried women at the work place
- ⇒ understand their economic status
- ⇒ examine their family relationships and their involvement in the care of elderly in the family, their levels of life satisfaction, and loneliness
- ⇒ ascertain their reasons for being single
- ⇒ understand their social networks and their leisure time activities



- ⇒ know their health situation, levels of loneliness, psychological well being and life satisfaction
- ⇒ assess their life satisfaction
- ⇒ find out their plans for immediate future and for their post retirement period, and
- ⇒ draw implications for policy and programmes with regard to the phenomenon under study with reference to social work practice

The study was taken-up in the city of Visakhapatnam. With a population of 13,45,938 (according to 2011 census), it is one of the rapidly growing cities in India. In this city because of industrialization, and urbanization greater employment opportunities are created for both men and women. As a result along with men more women are engaged in various jobs / works and gradually they are becoming more and more oriented to career than to marriage. As a result a considerable number of working women are remaining unmarried.

The focus of the present study is never married working women. These women constitute a segment whose individuality is rarely recognized and who suffer a lot both within and outside their families. In the Indian society, it is almost unknown for a woman not to marry, and marry, more over, at or soon after the onset of puberty; (Jethani, 1994). However as mentioned above this situation is changing due to the varied opportunities available for Indian women. Though, women are



aware of the advantages of marriage, there is also a realization among them that marriage is not the ultimate goal of life. Women are delaying or foregoing marriage under various socio economic conditions.

Failure to get married at an appropriate age leads many women to remain single forever. The major reasons could be dowry demand, greater employment opportunities leading to career growth, financial constraints, etc. These single women are deprived of social and emotional security which creates a lot of problems and stresses for them. Our society needs to understand the phenomenon of single hood and accept the new norm of never-married or remain single as an alternative to marriage in the society. Though, the overall percentage of such women is small, it is certainly not negligible. In a society where getting married is the norm how do these single women cope up and face the problems in the society? How do their parents / family members, colleagues and siblings behave with them? How happy are they with their existing situation? What are their plans after retirement? How do they perceive and understand other single women in the society? are some of the important areas needing to be probed.

Coming to the present study here the sample respondents i.e. the unmarried working women are defined as persons aged 35 years and above employed in an organized sector with more than three years of work experience, and with an educational qualification of intermediate and above and not married. After



reviewing the literature, the data sources available in the city for the generation of sample were considered from organizations such as academic, industrial, government and others (include NGOs). From these, some organizations were chosen purposively. Then the method of snowball sampling was used to select the sample and finally, around 82 respondents were identified and interviewed using an interview schedule. Further case studies of respondents were done.

Major Findings:

The major findings were drawn in the direction of identifying and focusing on the demographic profile, economic status, reasons for being single, social networks, work, family relations, loneliness, psychological well being life satisfaction and future plans. As the data were collected from a non-probability sample, the conclusions were limited mainly to the study sample. However, some general observations were made, when supported by the findings of earlier studies. Further implications for social work education and also for policy were drawn. Also recommendations were made to address the problem keeping in view the study conclusions.

Major findings of the study are -

1. Majority (54.9 percent) of the respondents are from academic institutions followed by government organizations and industrial organizations.
2. Majority (33.0 percent) of the respondents are in their late thirties i.e., they figured under the age group between 35 years and 40 years.



3. Majority (87.8 percent) of the respondents belong to Hindu religion. Of them, around 63.4 percent are from open castes like Brahmins, kammas and Reddies.
4. Majority (37.8 percent) of the respondents are post-graduates followed by under-graduates (36.5 percent).
5. Majority (56.0 percent) of the respondents are holding ministerial jobs, whereas 29.0 percent of the respondents are in teaching.
6. Majority (37.8 percent) of the respondents had work experience between 16 and 20 years.
7. Majority (45.0 percent) of the respondents are in the income group between Rs.5, 001/- and Rs.10, 000/- per month.
8. Majority (73.2 percent) of the respondents are playing supplementary earner role and the rest (26.8 percent) are in the status of chief bread winner.
9. Majority (60.0 percent) of the respondents own houses.
10. Majority (65.8 percent) mentioned having assets/property like house, house site, land and valuable items.
11. Majority (48.7 percent) of the respondents mentioned having property jointly with one of their family members, mostly brothers.
12. Majority (45.0 percent) of the respondents stated that they spend their entire earnings.
13. Majority (76.8 percent) of the respondents had savings on their names.
14. Majority (45.0 percent) of the respondents stated that they have debts.



15. Majority (56.7 percent) of the respondents mentioned that their major source for borrowing loans is cooperative society and office (employer), followed by banks.
16. Majority (40.0 percent) of the respondents mentioned that the purpose of borrowing loan is to purchase house / house site.
17. Majority (93.0 percent) of the respondents have job security. Around 65.0 percent of the respondents felt that the opportunities for their career growth are very high. And 89.0 percent of the respondents mentioned that their job is appropriate to their educational qualification.
18. Majority (78.0 percent) expressed job satisfaction where as around 10.0 percent of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction towards their present job.
19. Majority (93.0 percent) of the respondents mentioned that their employer / superior is a male person.
20. Around 30.0 percent of the respondents stated that their superiors are rigid & authoritarian, where as 8.0 percent of the respondents stated that their employers/superiors are exploitative and sometimes exhibit misbehaviors.
21. While around 3.6 percent of the respondents are willing to change their present job majority (96.0 percent) are going to continue with their present job.
22. Around 30.5 percent of the respondents stated that they are staying alone.
23. Majority (36.8 percent) of the respondents stated that their family income is in between Rs.10, 000/- and Rs.25, 000/- per month.



24. Nearly 60.0 percent of the respondents mentioned that they have family responsibilities. Of them, 79.0 percent respondents stated their major responsibility in the family is to take care of elders, followed by financial commitments.
25. Majority (70.0 percent) of the respondents mentioned that they are staying alone in a separate house from that of their natal family. Of them, majority (40.0 percent) stated that the reasons to stay separately are desire for independent living followed by death of parents.
26. Around 20.0 percent of the respondents mentioned that they are staying away from their families.
27. Majority (46.7 percent) of the respondents mentioned that they have no difficulties while staying alone, whereas 7.0 percent of the respondents stated that they are humiliated by men.
28. Majority (24.39 percent) of the respondents who stay away from families mentioned that their family members visit them regularly.
29. Majority (84.0 percent) of the respondents mentioned that they are consulted by their family members while decisions are made in the family.
30. Majority (65.0 percent) of the respondents mentioned that their opinions have been taken into consideration in their families.
31. Majority (53.8 percent) of the respondents reported that, individual decisions are preferred in their families, rather than collective ones.



32. Around 38.0 percent of the respondents expressed that their family members are supportive, friendly & understanding of them.
33. Almost all the respondents mentioned that their belongings are never taken by their family members without their knowledge.
34. Majority (97.0 percent) of the respondents reported that they have been given due recognition by their family members.
35. Majority (53.7 percent) of the respondents reported that an elderly family member is staying with them. Of these majority (63.0 percent) stated that the elderly person is their mother.
36. Majority (93.0 percent) of the respondents mentioned that they assist the elderly persons staying with them in terms of providing physical care, food and medical treatment.
37. Majority (69.0 percent) of the respondents reported that they have financial problems in their families.
38. A considerable percent (28.0) of the respondents reported that they have no interest in marriage and they voluntarily chose to be single.
39. Majority (53.0 percent) of the respondents opined that the age between 20 years and 25 years is the suitable time for getting married.
40. Majority (49.0 percent) of the respondents expressed that one can be happy without marriage, whereas 8.5 percent of the respondents expressed that no one can be happy without marriage.



41. Around 20.0 percent of the respondents are willing to get married and they have plans for the same. Further, majority (64.0 percent) of them reported that they are looking for a suitable good and understanding person.
42. Majority (67.0 percent) of the respondents said that they are leading a satisfying and happy life.
43. Majority (83.0 percent) said that they never regret their singlehood. Further, around 57.0 percent of the remaining respondents shared that they regret their singlehood when they are neglected and ignored.
44. Majority (72.0 percent) stated that they would approach their parents during times of emergency and need.
45. Majority (93.0 percent) of the respondents said that their request for help and assistance was accepted and obliged by the persons they request.
46. When it comes to social participation of the respondents, around 98.0 percent have friends. And most of them (65.0 percent) meet their friends at home.
47. Majority (55.0 percent) of the respondents stated that they would meet their friends/ relatives occasionally.
48. Majority (91.0 percent) of the respondents said that they have some one to confide in and trust during times of crises & illness. And most of these (65.0 percent) said that generally they confide in their siblings (either brother or sister).
49. Almost all (99.0 percent) reported that they receive invitations for social and cultural gatherings, and from their friends and relatives.



50. Around 89.0 percent of the respondents shared that they would attend most of the social functions and gatherings on receipt of an invitation.
51. Around 80.0 percent said that they would attend religious gatherings and go to temples and other religious centers.
52. Around 38.0 percent said that they attend religious meetings.
53. Around 55.0 percent respondents said that they participate in the religious activities only on auspicious days.
54. Most (47.0 percent) of the respondents attend the religious activities alone.
55. Majority (81.0 percent) of the respondents did not have membership in any clubs associations.
56. Majority (81.7 percent) of the respondents reported that others seek their advice and in 43.28 percent cases they are the respondents' friends. Mostly the advice is sought on aspects of family and financial matters followed by children's education.
57. Majority (93.0 percent) of the respondents said that they spend their time in watching television as their in-door activity
58. Coming to out-door activity, majority (82.0 percent) of the respondents stated that they go for shopping.
59. Around 65.0 percent of the respondents said that they didn't have any health problems.



60. Around 50.0 percent of the respondents stated that they have no specific plans for their immediate future. But the remaining 50.0 percent indicated their future plans which are more self directed.
61. Majority (22.0 percent) of those having specific plans for their future stated that they would strive to achieve their career goals, followed by getting married (20.0 percent).
62. Majority (65.0 percent) of the respondents stated that they would like to involve in working for a social cause during their post retirement period. Thus there was a marked difference between their pre retirement and post retirement plans. The later looked more altruistic.
63. When probed about having faced any uncomfortable or troublesome situation, majority (46.0 percent) of the respondents reported that they never faced any such situation till now in their lives.
64. Majority (56.0 percent) of the respondents stated that they did not have any advantage due to their single hood. On the other hand, around 60.0 percent of the respondents perceived that there is no disadvantage because of their singlehood.
65. Despite of the above, majority (76.0 percent) of the respondents are happy with single hood.
66. Majority (52.0 percent) of the respondents said that they have no opinion about other single women.



67. Majority (85.0 percent) of the respondents opined that single women should be strong and determined in their decisions whether the singlehood is self chosen or involuntary. Further, they felt that the State also should provide protection to these women. Around 12.0 percent of the respondents stated that there should be policies for the provision of shelter and protection for never-married women.
68. Majority of the respondents (47.56 percent) reported low levels of loneliness.
69. Most of the respondents reported positive psychological well being.
70. Majority of the respondents (76.8 percent) reported good life satisfaction.
71. A strong negative correlation is seen between loneliness and life satisfaction.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

It is evident that opportunities for education and employment for women are increasing day by day. While it is a positive trend, due to certain factors typical to Indian context like arranged marriages, dowry, women marrying up and men marrying down both in terms of age and education, career orientation and also due to familistic ideology some of the women are remaining unmarried. At present the number of such women is increasing.

For a majority of the sample population singlehood is involuntary in the sense that family commitments and constraints forced them to remain unmarried. The present study reveals that majority of the sample population are Hindus and come from middle and upper middle class, and are post graduates and graduates, holding both



managerial, ministerial, and also teaching jobs. Majority of the sample population, are having property and assets on their names. Majority of the sample population have a man as their superior / employer, and are not facing any problems in the job and would like to continue in their present jobs. However around 30.0 percent of the sample population stated that they are facing problems from their superiors who are rigid, authoritarian, and exploitative and exhibit misbehaviors occasionally.

When probed regarding the feelings of loneliness owing to their singlehood, very few stated that they experience loneliness only a few times. Though they face some problems due to singlehood, they said that on a whole they are satisfied and happy with their singlehood. Most of them reported that they attend and participate in social and cultural gatherings, and go out for shopping, and visit friends etc., during their leisure time. Majority of the respondents stated that they never visualized singlehood as a problem or a problematic choice.

The lives of these women are different from those of other married women in the sense that they deviated from “typical” female cycle: ‘marriage, motherhood, grand motherhood, and widowhood (in certain cases)’ (Allen & Pickett, 1987). As argued by Allen & Pickett (1987) explaining singlehood as a deviant life style in comparison to the ubiquitous pattern of being married may over look the nurturing role generally played by all women irrespective of their marital status. Mostly these women provided for their families and took care of their siblings. Not only



this they took forward this care giving in to their late adult stage and become caretakers of their parents. As indicated in the present study majority of the respondents stated that they are taking care of elderly family members, mostly their mothers. Finally they were of service to their natal families both in nurturing and economic capacity. Most of these women remained in their natal homes and went to work to support themselves and their families. In one sense these women broke the stereotype that a woman should be married to achieve fulfillment though at a personal cost of being looked down upon as 'abnormal' and stigmatized. However a deeper look in to their lives as is done in the case studies these women are worried about their future. What happens when their parents die and siblings occupy themselves with their families of procreation? Feeling of 'empty nest' is also experienced by these women who were surrogate parents for their younger siblings. There are undercurrents of feelings of insecurity regarding the life after retirement and during old age. While children are obliged to look after their parents and show familial gratitude, there is no such mandate for siblings toward their elder sisters who took care of them by providing financial support for nurturance and education when their parents are not in a position to do so. Studies (Lang & Schutze, 2002) have indicated that elderly persons' satisfaction improved when children expressed emotion or gave emotional satisfaction. Are the siblings able to provide it to their unmarried elderly sister who took care of them when they were young? On the whole, keeping an eye on the future basing on the study data the areas needing interventions seem to be creating social support systems,



combating stereotypic images, and creation of self help groups of unmarried single women.

Barrett's (1999) study on never married indicated that marital status and social support are important predictors of life satisfaction. Interestingly social support is found to be lessening the impact of marital status on life satisfaction indicating the importance of social support for unmarried in providing life satisfaction. These social support systems help the unmarried women to overcome emotional loneliness and in enhancing feelings of security.

Never married women are vulnerable to a variety of negative evaluations impacting their self esteem. The single women are stereotyped as less feminine, less affectionate, more emotionally rigid, not sexually attractive, highly independent and non accommodative (for eg. Nadelson & Nortman, 1981). This is because of the view people hold that marriage is the most important event in a woman's life and not able to marry is abnormal. In the west as pointed out by Veroff, Douvan and Kulka, (1981) individuals are less likely to see marriage as positive and are more likely to comment on the burdens and restrictions rather than the opportunities it brought to one's life. As a result it is possible to view singlehood as a personal choice and be away from stereotypes the unmarried are subjected to. Such a situation facilitates self esteem of the never married individuals (Libby, 1977). Having self esteem is very important as it is an important social



psychological factor. Thus there is a need for change in the attitude of people so that they are able to see unmarried women beyond the stereotyping images so far prevalent in the Indian context.

Areas for future Research:

The present study is more focused on the profiles of the never-married women. The researcher could bring out their profiles in terms of their social participation, work situations, relationships maintained with family members and relatives, friends, and colleagues. It has also drawn the level of loneliness and life satisfaction of the sample population. But, the present study did not focus on the psychological or physiological factors such as mental faculties and sexual & companionship needs. Also not probed are their life-styles versus their individual personalities. Hence there is a need to focus on these areas in future research.



Implications for social work education and practice:

As pointed out earlier social supports are very important for unmarried women.

Hence social workers can plan to enable these women to develop good communication skills which would lead to effective interpersonal relationships not only at their work place but also with the people in their neighbourhood. If they could establish good interpersonal relationships they could build social networks which they could effectively use whenever they need. And also these net works help them to overcome the feelings of loneliness. This is an important area for social work intervention as these factors more than the marital status are found to be important in the well being of an individual (Austrom, 1994).

Social workers play an important role in the family life education programmes.

The traditional programmes include information on various aspects of marriage and project it as an important milestone in the life of an individual especially a woman.

While these programmes can continue to talk about marriage they should also touch upon the aspects of non marriage so that there is more legitimacy and recognition of not getting married as an acceptable life style. Such efforts would help in removing stigma and stereotyping associated with unmarried status.

Helping unmarried women to form in to self help groups would go a long way in creating a platform for them to share their problems. The social workers' experience of working with various groups can contribute significantly for the



effective functioning of such groups. The members in such a group could provide supportive relationships to each other. Supportive relationships are crucial and they validate their singlehood as an acceptable adult status. The friendships that result among group members are an important source of self worth and gaining approval (Burr, Hill, Nye & Reiss, 1979). The homogenous values shared with the co-members of the self help group are a significant source of support and reinforcement to an unmarried woman as she functions and lives in a marriage based society. It assures never married women that they are not deviant adults, rather they are exacting appropriate and desirable adult roles (Cockrum & White, 1985). Thus effective social work interventions can be developed with unmarried working women.

