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Determinants of Psychological Problems among Heads of Actual Female Headed Households in Kerala

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ABSTRACT

As the leaders of households, women have to face more problems compared to male heads. But all the female heads are not facing similar problems. The objective of this study is to analyse psychological problems of heads of 'actual female headed households' in Kerala and to find out the determinants of their psychological problems. Data used for the study were collected from the three regions of Kerala, using a structured interview schedule. About 90 percent of the female heads of the households under study reported some psychological problems. All the stress factors considered for the study, namely financial stress, parental stress, domestic stress and health problems are significantly associated in the chi-square analysis with the psychological problems of the respondents. In the logistic regression analysis variables such as place of residence, education and parental stress have significant effect on the psychological problems of female heads.

KEYWORDS: Actual Female Headed Household, Pseudo Female Headed Household Psychological Problem, Financial stress, Domestic stress

Introduction

With the rapid increase in industrialization and urbanization on the one hand and increase in poverty and unemployment on the other, women's life style in many countries is undergoing a significant change**.** One of the major changes today is the increasing number of families headed by women. About thirty-three percent of households, worldwide, are estimated to be headed by women (Praveen and singh, 2008).

With the loss of male breadwinner in family, the poor woman faces difficulty in meeting the basic needs of children and other family members. Along with household duties the women have to take other duties usually done by male member. Moreover these women tend to suffer from a lack of identity associated with their husband, feeling of isolation, anxiety about future, helplessness, lack of peace of mind, feeling of insecurity etc. Thus financial problem and other stressful life event creates depressed mood and affect the psychological health (Nidhi Kotwal, Bharti Prabhakar, 2009).

Women in Kerala have better status in terms of sex ratio (1084) according to census2011, health and education compared to women in other states in India. At the same time Kerala has gender sensitive social development. The social economic and political vulnerability among women is reflected in high levels of gender based violence in particular domestic violence and rapid growth and spread of dowry (National Crime Records Bureau, various issues, Mukherjee et al., 1999). With this situation there is high incidence of female headed households due to widowed, divorce, etc (Sheela vargheese, 1996; Panda, 2003; National Family Health Survey(2005-06); Sunny, 2006).

The women experience different types of stress namely financial stress, parental stress, and stress due to over burden of daily household duties, stress due to health problem when they have to bear the responsibility of making decisions in the absence of their husband. There are still a few studies which analyse the psychological problems among female headed households in Kerala; this will be the focus of this study.

Objectives:

The objective of this study is to analyse the psychological problems among heads of actual female headed households in Kerala by their background characteristics and to find out the determinants of the problems.

Definition:

Two types of female headed households are defined in this study, namely 'Actual female headed households' and 'Pseudo female headed households'. A family without any adult male earning member is defined as an actual female headed household if woman head earns more than 60 percentage of the household income and is the chief decision maker. This situation arises through divorce, separation, widowhood or loss of ability of male breadwinner to earn and to take decisions due to long-term sickness or disability. It also contains households with only never married women. At the same time 'Pseudo female headed household' is defined as a household without regular presence of male head in the family and an adult woman providing daily household welfare through caring for children and aged persons in the family, without being the economic provider and chief decision maker. Only actual female headed households are considered for the present study.

Data

Data used for the study were collected from three districts, namely Thiruvananthapuram from south, Thrissur from central and Kannur from north of Kerala using a structured interview schedule. From each District one Block Panchayat and one Municipality / Corporation were selected randomly. From the block panchayats one Grama Panchayat was selected at random and from Municipality two wards were selected randomly. All female headed households were selected from the study area. Heads of 301 actual female headed households constitute the study population.

Methodology

A pilot study was conducted for measuring the psychological problems among female heads. Based on the opinion of experts, the problems were classified in to 11 categories and are included in the final questionnaire. The categories included are a) loss of identity b) feeling of isolation c) feeling of being exploited in the society d) depression e) anxiety f) unhappiness g) helplessness h) lack of peace of mind i) feeling of insecurity j) feeling of stress and k) feeling of worthlessness. The answers for these questions were scored using three point rating scale (0=never, 1=occasionally, 2=always) and scores obtained for all the items were added. On the basis of the total scores, the women were classified as having or not having psychological problems, with the help of experts. Bi-variate techniques and logistic regression model are used for the analysis.

Analysis

1.1 Socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the respondents

The following Table gives the percentage distribution of the female heads of households under study by different socio-economic and demographic characteristics.

Table 1 : Percentage distribution of the heads of the households by selected characteristics

Characteristics	Percentage of Households
Place of residence	
Rural	57.8(174)
Urban	42.2(127)
Religion	

Hindu	90.4(272)
Muslim	3.3(10)
Christian	6.3(19)
Social category	
Scheduled tribe/ Scheduled caste	16.9(51)
OBC	49.5(149)
Others	33.6(101)
Level of monthly income	
Low (< = 5000)	78.7(237)
Medium (5000-10000)	10.0(30)
High (>10000)	11.3(34)

About 58 percent of the female heads belong to rural areas. Major proportion of the heads belongs to Hindus (90.4 percent) and Muslims are lowest in proportion in the group (3.3 percent). About 17 percent of the heads belong to SC/ST category. As far as the economic status is concerned, about 79 percent of the female heads has low level of income.

Table 2 : Percentage distribution of Female Heads based on the presence of psychological problem.

Status of the Head	Percentage of Heads
Have Psychological problem	89.7(270)
No Psychological problem	10.3(31)

About 90 percent of the female heads of the households under study have psychological problems. It reveals the amount of stress and strain experienced by the heads of actual female headed households in Kerala.

The following table analyse the association of socio economic and demographic background of the female headed households with their psychological problems.

Table3- about here

Psychological problems of the female heads are higher in the rural areas, compared to their urban counterparts. In rural area 96 percent of the heads of female headed households have psychological problems, compared to only 81 percent in the urban area. Among the heads belonging to different Religious groups it can be seen that psychological problem is higher among Muslim women (100 percent) followed by Christians (94.7 percent) and Hindus (89 percent). Among different caste groups, female heads having psychological problem is highest in SC/ST category (94.1 percent) followed by OBC (90.6 percent) and is lowest among forward castes (86.1 percent). psychological problems are higher among the low income groups and income wise difference in the percentage of respondents with psychological problem is highly significant in the chi-square analysis. About 95 percent of the heads having low level of income have psychological problems compared to only 70.7 percent among medium and 73.5 percent among the high income categories.

Table 4- about here

The model suggests that the variables such as place of residence, education and parental stress have significant effect on the psychological problems of female heads. Female heads living in urban area have almost 69 percent lesser chance for high psychological stress than female heads in rural area. Also heads having education above secondary level have about 80 percent lesser chance to have psychological problems than those with an education of secondary or below level. Female heads with high parental stress have almost 3 times higher chance for having psychological problem compared to heads with low level of parental stress.

1.3 Summary and Conclusions

About 90 percent of the female heads of households in Kerala experience Psychological problems. Psychological problem is comparatively higher among female heads in rural area compared to urban area. It may be due to the difference in the social set up in the two areas. In the modern society money is the essential factor for leading a smooth life, the dearth of which may put pressure on the head of the household and ultimately create psychological problems. It may be the reason for higher percentage of heads with psychological problem among low income category.

Psychological problem is lowest among heads getting regular salary and is highest among those who work as casual/domestic workers or doing any other irregular work. Education of head has strong influence on psychological problem. Proportion heads who experience psychological problem gradually decreases with increase in their educational level. As far as the age of household head is concerned, higher proportion of heads in the younger ages experience psychological problem. Women heads with stress due to increased household duties, role strain and health problem experience psychological problem is higher than others. So measures should be taken by the Government of Kerala and by the local bodies for supporting female headed households in the State.

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