



## A Study on Perception of Family Members and In-law's Family towards Widow in the Rural Setting of Tamil Nadu

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### ABSTRACT

*Widows make up a significant proportion of the female population in all nations irrespective of developed and developing. Across the world, widows face two common problems: the first one is loss of social status and the second one is reduced economic conditions. These two common problems in turn force them to face lot of problems at various levels in their daily life. In some occasion even the family members treat them very badly and they are also subject to denial of basic rights. Due these reasons they have been excluded from the society. In order to include the widows in purview of the society, it is necessary to assess the perception of the family members and others in particular the in-laws towards the widow. The perception is one of the determinant factors of the behavior of the people. In order to assess the perception of the widows, the present study has been carried out among the widows in Thathampatty Division of Ayothiyapattanam Block, Salem District of Tamil Nadu.*

**KEYWORDS :** Family Members, Perception and Widows

### Introduction

India is a patriarchal society and in such a society women are one of the depressed groups who are denied the basic rights by the society. This problem gets worse in case of a widow. Due to long lasting Hindu traditions, many widows have been highly discriminated against in India (Ahmed, 2009, Ullich, 1998). Widows have long experienced social discrimination in India (Bhandari, 2004). The husband is recognized on the heads of the household and the wife's role as a head of the household is socially disapproved (Swain and Pillai, 2005). In a recent poll that compared 17 countries on discrimination against widows, a significant number of the Indian sample, 42 per cent reported that widowed women were treated somewhat or a great deal worse than other women (World Public Opinion, 2008). Dreze and Srinivasan (1998) found that widows experienced the highest rate of poverty followed by women who had never been married, widower and men who had never been married.

Chakravarti (1998) cited that four cultural factors which limit widows from full participation in the social life of the community. First, widows are expected to withdraw themselves from public gaze and public participation as much as possible. She is expected to be virtuous and remain home as much as possible and submit herself to surveillance by elder members of the family. Second, she is expected to Pushpanjali Swain and Vijayan K. Pillai remain unmarried and refrain from sexual activities the rest of her life. To mark her lack of interest in sex, she is expected to wear white clothing and to forgo ornaments such as bangles. Third, she is restricted even from participating in domestic ceremonies that women perform in the household. Finally, she is not to assert her rights to property, if any, left behind by her deceased husband.

Jamuna and Ramamurti, (1988) Widowhood has meaning only in a psychological and social context in which it occurs. Social mores and norms of Hindu welfare have relegated the widow virtually to a hell on earth. If there is anything that a woman abhors in her life it is the loss of her spouse and becoming a widow. In fact, all blessing given to married women invariably contain the phrase "Dheerga Sumangali Bhava." It is to say that "Dheergayushu" is useless if you are not a sumangali. So strong is the prejudice in favour of "Sumangali" and against "amangali". In the ultimate sense what matters is the state of mind. If one thinks of herself as a widow with all its associated paraphernalia, she is only doomed to depression. If on the other hand, she considers herself as a person with her own individual identity, she becomes "a woman of conviction" and self-esteem. The sacred texts have encouraged woman predeceasing the husband and if not, through sati, where she seeks to end her life along with her spouse.

### Methodology

The universe for the present study is the widows in Thathampatty Di-

vision of Ayothiyapattanam Block, Salem District. This Thathampatti Division is consisting of 32 revenue villages. Among the 32 villages, two villages are located in very remote area. In order to consider time and energy, the researchers have selected 30 villages from this division. From each village the researcher has identified 90 respondents by using snowball sampling method. A structured interview schedule has used as a tool of data collection. The interview schedule contains personal profile of the respondents, family particulars, age at marriage, particulars of the husbands and problem experienced by the respondents. Before collecting the data researchers have explained the purpose of the study in a detailed manner and also assured the respondents that the collected data used only for research purpose. In this way the researchers established a rapport with the respondents as well as created confidence among them. The researchers spent 20 minutes to 30 minutes for each and every respondent. The simple table and percentile score have been used for analyzing the data. Since this study describe the characteristics of the widows and therefore descriptive research design has been used.

### Results

**Table No. 1**  
**Distribution of the Respondents based upon their Age**

S. No.	Age	Widows	Percentage
1	20-30	16	17.78
2	30-40	38	42.22
3	40-50	33	36.67
4	50-60	03	03.33
	Total	90	100.00

The above table shows that 42.22 per cent of the respondents are belonging to the age group of 30-40 years, 36.67 per cent of the respondents are belonging to the age group of 40-50 years, 17.78 percent of the respondents are belonging to the age group of 20-30 years, and remaining 3.33 percent of the respondents are belonging to the age group of 50-60 years.

With regard to education, 33.33 per cent have complied primary level of education, 26.67 per cent of the respondents are illiterates, 23.33 per cent of the respondents have completed high school level of education, 8.89 per cent of the respondents have completed higher secondary level of education and remaining 7.78 per cent of the respondents have completed under graduate level of education.

While considering pattern of marriage, 60 per cent of the respondents mentioned that their marriage is arranged one, 23.33 per cent of the re-

spondents indicated that their marriage is love cum arranged one and 16.67 per cent of the respondents revealed that their marriage is love.

While analyzing the reasons for the death of the husband, one-third of the respondents (33.33 %) mentioned that suicide is the cause for their husband's death, another one-third of the respondents (33.33 %) revealed that their husband died naturally because of old age, 21.22 per cent of the respondents indicated that illness like TB, kidney failure, jaundice, etc is the main reason of their husband's death and remaining 12.22 per cent of the respondents said that their husband died due to accident.

With regard to deviant behavior of respondents' husband, 65.56 per cent of the respondents mentioned that their husband have smoking habits and 74.44 per cent of the respondents revealed that their husband have alcohol consumers.

**Table No. 2**  
**Distribution of the Respondents based upon their the Perception of their Family Members**

S. No.	Perception of the Family Members	Widows	Percentage
1	Very good	25	27.78
2	Good	38	42.22
3	Neutral	19	21.11
4	Bad	08	08.89
5	Very bad	-	-
	Total	90	100

The above table shows that 42.22 per cent of the respondents said that the perception of the family members is good, 27.78 per cent of the respondents mentioned that the perception is very good, 21.11 per cent of the respondents revealed that the perception of the family members is neutral, and remaining 8.89 per cent of the respondents replied that the perception of the family members is bad.

**Table No. 3**  
**Distribution of the Respondents based upon the Perception of the Husband's Family Members**

S. No.	Perception of the husband's Family Members	Widows	Percentage
1	Very good	07	07.78
2	Good	42	46.67
3	Neutral	28	31.11
4	Bad	08	08.89
5	Very bad	05	05.55
	Total	90	100.00

The above table shows that 46.67 per cent of the respondents revealed that the behaviors of the husband's family members is good, 31.11 per cent of the respondents mentioned that such behavior is neutral, 8.89 per cent of the respondents indicate that such behavior is bad, 7.78 per cent of the respondents said that such behavior is very good, and remaining 5.55 per cent of the respondents replied that the perception of the husband's family members is very bad.

With regard to level of satisfaction of life of the respondents when they live with the husband, 48.89 per cent of the respondents revealed that they felt good when they lived with their husband, 21.11 per cent of the respondents felt average, 18.89 per cent of the respondents felt very good, 11.11 per cent of the respondents pointed out that they felt bad when they lived with their husband.

### Conclusion

The widows in the study area are living in poor socio-economic conditions. Similarly the perception of the family members as well as the perception of the in-laws' family is moderate level towards the respondents. The perception of the family members as well as the perception of the in-laws' family was remain at moderate level when the respondents' husband was alive. Exactly 40 per cent of the respondents revealed that their life was either bad or average when they lived with husband. Therefore it is concluded that the basic rights of the women dined by both the family members as well as the in-laws' family before and after marriage. In order to overcome this issue it is necessary to introduce the gender based education at the school level as well as more number of programs to be televised, broadcasted and publicized in various medium of the mass media.

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