



## Psychosocial Issues and Widowhood

### KEYWORDS

Loneliness, Social network, Psychosocial Issues.

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### ABSTRACT

*The death of a spouse is one of the most profound and life-altering events adults will ever experience. One of the biggest problems reported by both widows and widowers is loneliness, which may last well beyond the usual period of mourning. Loneliness can be described as a gnawing chronic disease without redeeming features which has long been recognized as a strong correlate of depressive symptoms. The aim of the study is to investigate the psychosocial issues among widows and widowers. 30 widows and 30 widowers were selected from Hyderabad between the age groups of 40yrs-70yrs. UCLA Loneliness Scale by Russell, 1996 and Lubben Social Network Scale by Lubben, 1988 were used. The results show that widowers are experiencing significant loneliness than widows and no difference was found on social network and significant difference found based on age groups.*

### INTRODUCTION

Widowhood refers to the status of a person whose spouse has died and who has not remarried. Widowhood often is accompanied by emotional distress, physical symptoms, compromised health behaviors, potentially disruptive residential relocations and economic strains triggered by both the direct costs of medical care and funeral arrangements at the end of a spouse's life, as well as the loss of the spouse's income. Widowhood among women aged 45 to 59yrs is relatively rare in Western Europe and the developed regions outside Europe are 5 and 7 percent, respectively. In contrast, in Africa and Southern, South-Eastern and Central Asia, on average, between 16 and 19 percent of women in this age group are widows (The World's Women, 2000). In the oldest age group 65+years, depression may be associated with mortality, hopelessness and dissatisfaction with one's life shows to be associated with loneliness (Holmen et al, 1999; Cohen, 2000; Tilvis et al, 2000; Alpass & Neville, 2003; Adams et al, 2004; Victor et al, 2005; Barg et al, 2006). Studies revealed that lower levels of loneliness are associated with marriage (Hawkey et al., 2005; Pinqart & Sorenson, 2003), higher education (Savikko et al., 2005). A study revealed that the single elders are having significant depression and suicidal ideation than coupled elders (Sridevi, 2014a) and the non-institutionalized single elders are showing significant death depression than coupled elders (Sridevi, 2014b). The social network and social support are associated with increased loneliness, complicated grief, poorer coping levels, lower levels of quality of life, increased levels of depression, poorer mental health and decreased psychological well-being (Fry, 2001; Lee et al, 2001). Widowers are more uncomfortable than widows in planning social interactions and seeking help when needed (Balaswamy et al., 2004), and they are vulnerable to loneliness (Dykstra, 1999; Stevens, 1995) and depressive symptoms during bereavement (Lee et al, 2001). Stroebe et al., (2001) confirmed a negative relationship between social support and depression levels, especially among widowers in the acute grieving period. A study concluded that there is no significant difference in death anxiety and death depression among institutionalized elders based on gender but non-institutionalized male elders are having significant death anxiety

than female elders (Sridevi & Swathi, 2014). A similar study revealed that widows were significantly depressed than widowers and older widows and widowers experienced more depression than younger age groups (Bharathi et al., 2015).

### METHODOLOGY

Aim of the study is to examine the psychosocial issues among widows and widowers. The sample consists of 30 widows and 30 widowers from Hyderabad between the age group of 40yrs-70yrs. Purposive sampling method was used in this study. The data was collected through personal contact by visiting their residing places.

### Inclusive Criteria:

1. Age range between 40-70yrs
2. 6 to 24 months of Bereavement period
3. Who are able to read and write and
4. Those who are ready to participate.

### Exclusive Criteria:

1. Who had current or past history of mental illness
2. Who had chronic physical illness
3. Who are institutionalized

### Tools used:

1. UCLA Loneliness Scale (Third version) (Russell, 1996)
2. Lubben Social Network Scale (Lubben, 1988)

**Statistical Analysis:** 't' test & 'F' test were used to find out the significance of difference between the loneliness and social network in widows and widowers for various variables selected for the study.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic data shows that 50% are widows and 50% are widower and each age range had 33.3% of widows and widowers. The majority (over 60%) of the widows and widowers hail from rural areas and similarly, more than 60% subjects had completed higher secondary education. At the time of study most of the subjects (75%) were living with their children and close to 60% were belong to middle socioeconomic class. The bereavement period was be-

tween 6 and 12 months in nearly 40% of the widows and widowers.

**Table-1: Mean ( $\pm$ SD) score on loneliness and social network measures in widowed men (n=30) and women (n=30).**

Variable	Men	Women	t	sign (p)
Loneliness	49.9( $\pm$ 12.2)	44.23( $\pm$ 8.08)	2.12	0.03*
Social network	25.5( $\pm$ 7.95)	23.46( $\pm$ 7.91)	0.99	0.32

\*\*\*= p<0.001 level and \*= p<0.05 level

Table-1 shows that there is a significant difference in widows and widowers with respect to loneliness and the Mean(+SD) scores of loneliness in men is 49.9(+12.2) and in women is 44.23(+8.08) which suggest that the widowers are experiencing intensive loneliness than widows. There is no significant difference found on social network among widows and widowers. The results indicate that widowers are experiencing significant loneliness than widows and no difference found on social network from both groups.

**Table-2: shows Mean, Standard deviation and significance level for 3 age groups on loneliness and social network.**

Variables	40-49yrs	50-59yrs	60-69yrs	f	Sig(p)
Loneliness	42.05( $\pm$ 7.95)	42.45( $\pm$ 6.8)	56.7( $\pm$ 9.7)	20.32	0.01*
Social network	25.05( $\pm$ 7.71)	21.15( $\pm$ 6.8)	27.25( $\pm$ 8.33)	3.26	0.04*

\*= p<0.05 level

Table-2 shows that there is a significant difference in widows and widowers with respect to loneliness based on age groups. The Mean(+SD) scores of loneliness of widows and widowers in the age groups of 40-49yrs is 42.05(+7.95) and in the age group of 50-59yrs is 42.45(+6.8) and for the age group of 60-69yrs is 56.7(+9.7). The age group of 60-

69yrs widows and widowers are experiencing more loneliness than the age group of 50-59yrs and 40-49yrs.

It shows that there is also a significant difference on social network in widows and widowers based on age groups. The Mean(+SD) scores of social network of widows and widowers in the age groups of 40-49yrs is 20.05(+7.71) and in the age group of 50-59yrs is 21.15(+6.8) and for the age group of 60-69yrs is 27.25(+8.33). It suggests that older widows and widowers are experiencing significant loneliness and lesser social network than younger widows and widowers.

## DISCUSSION

The results indicated that widowers are experiencing significant loneliness than widows and no difference found on social network from both groups. The similar finding suggested by Dugan & Kivett, 1994; Dykstra & De Jong Gierveld, 1999; Holmen et al., 1992; Samuelsson et al., 1998 that higher levels of loneliness are associated with diverse and widowhood and small social network by Hawkey et al., 2005; Mullins & Dugan, 1990. Similarly a study revealed that decreased loneliness in widows has been attributed to enhanced formal social participation and involvement in personal networks (Utz et al, 2002). It also suggested that older widows and widowers are experiencing significant loneliness and lesser social network than younger age groups. The similar findings suggest that an increased risk of psychological morbidity following a loss of partner up to two years (Zisook et al, 1994) and physical health symptoms (Hawkey et al., in press).

## CONCLUSION

1. There is a significant difference on loneliness among widows and widowers.
2. There is no significant difference on social network among widows and widowers.
3. The older widows and widowers are experiencing significant loneliness and lesser social network than younger age groups

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