SINGLE HEADED HOUSEHOLDS AND FAMILY DISORGANISATION AT NEYVELI INDUSTRIAL TOWNSHIP

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Abstract

Family is the most important primary group in the society which shapes the personality of its members. Due to industrialization and urbanization the family has undergone structural and functional changes. The changing status of women and the influence of western values especially the emerging concepts like companionship or living together without marriage has posed a threat on the mere existence of the institution of family. There is an increasing trend of single parent families. Hence a research study was carried out to find out the problems of female headed families at Neyveli Industrial Township.

INTRODUCTION

Family is the most important primary group in the society. It is the basic unit in which the personality of the child is formed. Freudian theory emphasizes the parental role in shaping the personality of the child. It is within the family, the family members get fulfilled their biological, psychological and emotional needs. Every member in the family is united by the bond of love and affection. This bond is loosened or broken by the various external factors which result in disorganization of the family.

Factors responsible for the family disorganization

Each one in the family has his/her own duties and responsibilities. If an individual fails to perform his duties or responsibilities and the deviant behaviour of any one of the family member affects the whole functioning of the family. The changing status and pattern of family create more changes in the structure and functions of the family. Women have been given educational and employment opportunities. The roles of both men and women have been changing under present social set up. In the past men went to work and women were engaged in household tasks such as cooking, cleaning and child rearing. Now it has changed. Both men and women share all these tasks which also create conflict between them. On the other hand women face more problems at home as well as in their working place. Increasing industrialization which results in urbanization cause changes in family structure and functions. People migrate from rural areas to urban areas for employment. Thus the joint family system is slowly breaking down and paving way for more emergence of nuclear family system not only in urban areas but also in traditional village communities. Being employed, if both the parents go for work, mostly there is nobody available to take care of the children at home, thus the children do not get proper care which also lead to deviant behaviour of the children. This is one of the causes for family disorganization. Problems like marital conflict, divorce, desertion, poverty, ill health, unemployment, indebtedness, infidelity, inter-caste and inter-communal marriages are some of the causative factors for the family disorganization. The
changing status of women and the influence of western values especially the emerging concepts like companionship or living together without marriage has posed a threat on the mere existence of the institution of family. The women are the most vulnerable sect which suffers more by these factors. Women face problems at home and in the working places. There is an increasing trend of single parent families. Hence a research study was carried out to find out the problems of female headed families at Neyveli Industrial Township.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
By reviewing the available literature on single headed families, it was found that Female Headed Households faced problems in maintaining the family. The study by D. Sathya Leela (1988) clearly explains the problems faced by the single mothers in Visagapatnam, Andhrapradesh. She has reported that majority of them were poor and they were working in unorganized sectors where there was no equal wages for men and women. They also faced problems regarding child rearing and arranging marriages for their daughters. Few studies described the socio-economic hardships of the single headed mothers and their anxiety regarding their children’s future. (Shalini Bharat, (1988), Gurmeet M.P. Singh and Sukhdeep Gill (1986)) N.S. Krishna Kumari (1987) stressed the grief was greater among young widows who were always looking after the very young children. Also, it was found that the widows were forbidden to participate in religious functions and wear jewels, (Araddhya, 1987).

Keeping all these factors suggested the need for periodical researches on various aspects and problems of Female Headed Households in different places.

Objectives of the study
- To explain the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents.
- To study and analyse as the head of the family in meeting the needs of the family members.
- To find out various problems faced by the respondents.
- To suggest suitable measures to improve the condition of the respondents.

Operational Definition
Single Parents: In the present study the widows who were heading the family alone and residing at Neyveli Industrial Township, Cuddalore Dt were considered as single parents.

Sampling and Design
A sample of 55 widows was studied by selecting them purposively at Neyveli Township. The study described the profile of socio-economic conditions of the respondents, problems faced by them. Thus the research design used in this study was descriptive in nature.

Data Collection
An interview schedule was constructed after conducting pre-test. The data were collected by contacting the respondents at their homes or at their working places.

Some of important findings
A large number of the widows were in the age group of 35-45 years, i.e. at their
middle age at the time of the interview. Majority of the respondents’ husbands died due to various occupational diseases such as T.B, cancer, etc. Alcoholism was the main reason for some of the person’s death. As majority of them belonged to vanniar caste, it was reported that women were not allowed to go for higher education. After the respondents’ husbands’ death, they were given jobs at Neyveli Lignite Corporation (NLC). With their limited educational qualification, they were appointed only as clerks, attenders, etc. Their limited income was not sufficient for them to run the family. In majority of the families the single earners were the respondents only. On the whole, the earner-dependent ratio was 1:2.3 which clearly explains that for every earner (widowed women) there were at least 2.3 dependents in their families. It restricts their standard of living at a larger extent. Their economic condition had been very poor. More than three fourth of the families’ annual income ranged from Rs.15,000 to Rs.25,000 while the other one fifth of the families earned their income just below Rs.10,000 per annum.

Almost every respondent faced problems in rearing their children and in taking care of their needs. As the responsible head of the family, the single women were forced to satisfy the need of the family members. The study showed that half of the respondents could not provide properly the basic needs of the family (such as food, clothing, school fees, etc.). The family members were not satisfied with the respondents. Less than one fourth of the respondents’ families had school drop outs. That was due to financial problems, the absence of the father figure and the respondents alone could not control the children. Few have reported that their children have been stopped from school by the respondents themselves, because they had to do baby sitting. Also the respondents faced adjustmental problems in the family in satisfying their children’s needs, arranging marriages for their children, getting employment for them etc. About widow remarriage, majority of them did not support for widow remarriage due to cultural compulsion and social taboo on widow remarriage. A higher number of widows felt that widowhood is a disgrace for them because they think it is very difficult for a widowed woman to run their family and they were restricted from attending the family functions. This is due to the existing social taboos and cultural inhibitions regarding widowhood in the society. It is important to mention here a larger number of widows agreed the fact that such restrictions on widows attending the ceremonies are acceptable one.

Based on this study a few case studies were conducted in order to highlight especially the families in distress. One such case study is given below.

The respondent was from a poor family. Being belong to vanniar community, she had been educated only up to 8th standard. She had two elder sisters and two elder brothers and all had got married. She was the last child in the family. Immediately after attaining puberty, she was stopped from school. She got married at the age of 18 and lost her husband after a year of her marriage. She was 20 year old and had a child of 8 months old when she was interviewed. Her husband was an electrician in NLC.
He was an alcoholic and he used to beat his wife everyday after consuming alcohol. A year after her marriage, her husband had committed suicide under the influence of alcohol. She was harassed and driven away by her in-laws. She was forced to live with her widowed mother. She had settled her husband’s debt Rs.13,000 by selling her jewels which was given to her at the time of her marriage. Her husband’s gratuity was taken by her in-laws. She faced socio-economic problems, emotional and psychological problems. She found it very difficult to manage with the limited income from a piece of land which belonged to them. She was not able to get married though she was willing. Her parents never even thought about that. She was not even allowed to dress up well.

**The scope of social work intervention and future plans:**

Social work intervention is very much needed in bringing changes in their outlook towards widowhood and also for better socio-economic condition, the people’s indifferent attitudes towards widows and their conservative ideas about themselves. This would enable them to strengthen their family bond. From the study it was found that the widows faced social, economical, emotional and adjutmental problems at different points of time in their life.

Guidance and counseling could be offered to them in order to adjust in the family and in the working place. The widowed women can utilize the function of women’s club which may enable them to have discussion on their problem and may have relaxation by using the recreational facilities there. The study reveals that alcoholism was prevailing in the study area. Hence there is a need to open counseling and de-addiction centre to reduce the employee’s problems and also reduction of the incidences of deaths due to alcoholism in future. The women may make money by supplementary work at home such as basket making, pickle making, etc. They can have kitchen garden at their homes so that they can get the vegetables required for their family to minimize their expenditure on food items to a certain extent.

The mass media can play an important role in changing the attitudes of the society towards widows. Some of the old traditions have been disappearing today but the media teaches /reminds the old traditions which may make widowed women’s life miserable. Hence such kinds of scenes have to be removed from films and successful stories of widowed women could be picturised so that women at all odd situations come up in life.

**REFERENCES**