

# Female headed household- An Overview-Review paper

Deepika Deswal & Shikha Bidhan

P.hd research scholar, Department of Sociology, CCS Haryana Agricultural University, Hisar, (Haryana)

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## Abstract

The female head of household for census purposes is a person who is recognised as such by the household. She is generally the person who bears the chief responsibility for managing the affairs of the household and takes decision on behalf of the household. The head of household need not necessarily be the oldest male member or an earning member, but may be a female or a younger member of either sex. According to the latest data from Census 2011 released by the office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, Over 16 per cent of households in Tamil Nadu are headed by women. Out of 1.85 crore households in the state, 29 lakh households are headed by women. This is the highest figure in the country and it is also greater than the national average. In rural areas, the number of households headed by women is 16.65 lakh, while in the urban areas the number is 12.99 lakh. The data that also interprets the number of households on the basis of religion and sex, reveals that in the state, more percentage of Muslim women head the households than women from other faiths.

**Introduction-** A 'household' is usually a group of persons who normally live together and take their meals from a common kitchen unless the exigencies of work prevent any of them from doing so. In patriarchal societies all over the world and in India in particular, an elderly male member of the family is considered the 'household head'. But sometimes the role of adult male member in the family may change due to widowhood, divorce, separation migration of male member for a long time or loss of economic function by resident male due to severe disability or illness. With change of household structure, and development, women are now assuming headship status in the household and such households are termed as female headed households. In patriarchal societies all over the world and in India in particular, an elderly male member of the family is considered the 'household head'. But sometimes the role of adult male member in the family may change due to widowhood, divorce, separation migration of male member for a long time or loss of economic function by resident male due to severe disability or illness. With change of household structure, and development, women are now assuming headship status in the household and such households are termed as female headed households.

Martins (2008) describe two major categories of FHHs:

1. **De jure:** A de jure female-headed household exists when the head of the household is unmarried woman (single), divorced, widowed or with no husband in the household
2. **De facto households:** households comprise of wives of male migrants, or women who play the dominant role even with the presence of a male partner in their lives. Thus, the de facto female-headed household is when the head of the household is in practice a female due to the fact that the male head is absent throughout the year or for a longer time. The wife becomes the main decision maker during the husband's absence and thus heads by default.

## **Incidence of Female-Headed Households**

### **India Faces Poorly On Households Headed By Women**

#### **The National figure**

Census (2011) The figures in Tamil Nadu is higher than the national average. In the country, the percentage of households headed by women is 13.17. Out of total 24.88 crore households in the country, 3.27 crore households are headed by women. The Christian community, at 17.4 per cent, has the highest percentage of female-headed households in India, followed by the Buddhists women at 15.9 percent .Out of 24.88 crore households in India, 20.24 crore households (81.3 per cent) belong to Hindus, 3.12 crore (12.5 per cent) households belong to Muslims, 63 lakh (2.5 per cent) households belong to Christians.

#### **International figure**

The Hindu (2016) In terms of female-headed households in the country, India occupies the 67th position worldwide. Belarus (53.9 per cent), Ukraine (49.4 per cent), Swaziland (47.9 per cent), Eritrea (46.7 per cent), Cuba (46.4 per cent) are the top five nations having the highest women-headed households. There are a number of social indicators India has a lot of work to do and more so with respect to gender parity, equality and independence of women. Government policies has its limits when it comes to social impact and bringing about social change, it is down to us as citizens to give these issues a serious thought and implement it in real lives and bring about change the we all want to see. There are about 27 million female headed households in the country. They constitute 10.9% of the total households in the country.

## **Reasons for emergence of Female Headed Households**

- The broad range of domestic situations typically characterized by the absence of a resident male head, viz, widowhood, divorce, separation and desertion,
- Migration of male members for long time.
- Loss of economic function by resident males due to severe unemployment, disability, illness and male reluctance to accept jobs seen as status reducing, etc.
- Households with no mature sons
- Sons residing in independent nuclear units.

## Survival strategies of FHHs

Survival Strategies: These include various mechanisms employed by the aged women to cope with problems arising from being heads of households.

- **Farm activities are** – Harvesting crops, spraying fields, seeding, tilling fields, breeding cows, vaccinating calves, pasturing livestock, feeding livestock.
- **Non-Farm Activities-** includes activities excluding agriculture. Some of the non - farming activities are: Dairy, Small - Scale Manufacturing, Shops, Transport

## Reviews

- **Rao, E. Krishna (2006)** - reported that in rural India, the percentage of women who depend on agriculture for their livelihood is as high as **84%**. Women make up about **33%** of cultivators and about **47%** percent of agricultural laborers.
- **Das et al. (2006)** -revealed that women participation in various agricultural activities such as making seedbeds, transplanting, lifting weeds, harvesting, threshing husking rice etc. They undertook the 68.5 per cent of total agricultural work where as men 31.5 per cent of total agricultural work.
- **Singh,R & Sengupta, R. (2009)** reported that In India, agriculture is a highly gender sensitive sector. 75.38% of all women workforce are engaged in agriculture. Within agriculture, 94% of women in crop cultivation are in cereal production and other crops, 1.4% in vegetable production and horticulture, while 3.72% are engaged in fruits, nuts, and spice crops.
- Women's participation rate (% share in all workers) is high in tea plantations (47.08%), cotton cultivation (46.84%) and growing oil seeds (45.43%). Vegetables also show a high share of women workers (39.13%). All these crops need labour intensive work. Foodgrains production too draws about 33 percent of its labour from women while growing of sugarcane and sugar beet draws 25.5 percent. Women are also significantly engaged in agricultural allied activities, for example in animal husbandry (7.03% of women engaged in agriculture & allied activities, and 71.08% of women engaged in agricultural allied activities), plantations and fisheries. These are also significant livelihood options for women in specific regions in India.

## Causes of FHHs:

1. **Widowhood:** Defined as those who responded they had not been married after the death of their spouse. A **widow** is a woman whose spouse has died, while a widower is a man in that situation. The state of having lost one's spouse to death is termed widowhood.

## Reviews

- **Diana, C et.al (2010)** reported that the causes for widowhood are: diseases, conflict and accidents (i.e. flood, fire, car, hunger, and thirst). Health related problem is by far the largest cause of death for the husbands of widowed FHHs, which accounted about 84.6%. Others like social and economic factors contribute fewer shares for the cause of widowed, which recorded 12.8% and 2.6%.

2. **Divorce** : the legal dissolution of a marriage by a court or other competent body.

## Reviews

- **Jacob (2016)** There, however, emerged striking differences in divorce rates between States. For instance, several States in the south and the northeast reported higher rates of divorce than those in the north. While the divorce rate for India as a whole was 0.24%, it was as high as 4.08% in Mizoram. In Tripura, it was 0.44% and 0.32% in Kerala. The tribal-dominated Chhattisgarh recorded 0.34% and Gujarat 0.63%.
- **Vyas, M. (2015)** reported that in the year 2013 around 5740 divorce cases were filed in Family Court Mumbai, a jump of 48.58% compared to 3863 cases in 2009. Also, the jump is quite significant compared to 4105 divorce cases being filed in 2012. While in 2014, till March 31, 454 couples have already decided to get separate through legal process.
- From the causes of FHHs, divorce by itself is resulted from a number of factors. Divorced, according to CSA (2010), the first reason for the cause of divorce mentioned is social factors, which accounted for 40.3%. Economic or political problem 33.9% is also given as the second common reason for the cause of divorce. Health related problem and cultural factors comprised of equal percentage i.e., 12.9%, for the causes of divorce. Divorce sometimes occurs when there is disagreement between partners' parents over their couples permanent living place i.e. matrilocal (wife's parents living place) or patrilocal (husband's parents (fathers) living place).

## Desertion/ Separation :

Deserted or separated couples were considered to be married unless they have dissolved their marriage agreement. For males, leaving the area in search of work and better life is prevalent mainly during crop failure, lack of money to pay back credits and lack of food in the household. Various factors contribute for the formation of deserted woman such as war participation, migration, resettlement, dissatisfaction and others. Followed by social reasons, 33.3% Social factors are a combination of reasons, which could also be sources for the disintegration of partners.

## Reviews

- Chattopadhyay (2011) looked at 2011 census data and found that, surprisingly, there was virtually no difference in dissolution rates — which includes separation rates — between rural India (0.82% of the married population) and urban India 0.89%).
- India's census gives its citizens the following choices to select their status: never married, separated, divorced, widowed, married. It is true that some women may not report separation or divorce because of the stigma attached to the status. But here are some of the more salient findings of the study: 1.36 million people in India are divorced. That is equivalent to 0.24% of the married population, and 0.11% of the total population.
- More strikingly, the number of people separated is almost thrice the number of people divorced - 0.61% of the married population and 0.29% of the total population. More women are divorced and separated than men.
- Divorce rates in north-east states are relatively higher than elsewhere in India: Mizoram has the highest divorce rate (4.08%), more than four times that of Nagaland, the state with the second highest rate (0.88%).
- Gujarat reports the maximum number of divorce cases among bigger states - with a population of more than 10 million - followed by Assam, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Jammu and Kashmir.
- Meghalaya has the most number of cases of separation, followed by Mizoram, Sikkim, Kerala and Chhattisgarh. Three of these five states are in north-eastern India.
- **Jayshree (2014)** From the sample survey of 150 FHHs, the two most common reasons for being a female head of household are, understandably, widowhood and divorce. About 52% and 41.3% of the total respondents are widowed and divorced. Desertion accounted for 9% from the total respondents. The remaining 0.7%, which is so negligible were never married. Widowed, divorced, desertion and never-married are also the outcomes of social, economic, political, cultural, and health factors. Under this study social factors include unequal decision power, violence, conflict over household resources, physical beatings and abuse of wife, establishing bad relations with neighbors and relatives, intoxication, jealousy, extravagancy, laziness, and accidents. Economic-political factors comprise of migration, impoverishment, resettlement, war, poor financial management and dowry shortages.

## Constraints faced by FHHs

### 1. Financial problem

Financial problems or financial pressure is a situation where money worries are causing you stress. Financial problems can ultimately lead to a bad credit rating. This can affect one's ability to buy a house, purchase a car or even get a job.

#### Reviews

- **Census (2011)** a total of 23 million households in rural India are headed by females. Out of these, 10.11% earn less than Rs.5,000 a month and 0.89% earn more than Rs.10,000 a month. Overall, 14 million households are “considered for deprivation”. The grading of deprivation is based on the condition of housing, landlessness, absence of an able-bodied adult member, any adult male member or a literate adult.
- **Park SK (2005)** reported that Economic strain also has a significant effect on single parent families’ physical and mental well-being. In fact, 20.8% of single parents reported feeling chronically unwell yet being unable to see a doctor, with 53.4% of these citing “economic strain” as the primary reason for not seeking medical advice, which is a higher percentage than the national average.
- **Lini G R (2013)** revealed that in their study, About half of actual FHHs in rural area 50.3 percent have low level of income compared to only about 16 percent of FHHs in rural area. At the same time in urban area the actual FHHs. having lower level of income are only 36.5 percent. Similar to the case of rural area only a smaller proportion of actual FHHs. in urban area has lower income level (19.2 percent) and the remaining 80.8 percent of actual FHHs. are financially well off.

### 2. Health problem

Health problem: is a state in which you are unable to function normally and without pain and a problem that affects someone's health

#### Reviews

- **Shikha et,al.(2017)** reported that Hypertension occurs at a rate of 20%. Arthritis also occurs at a high rate 9.6% this is probably attributed to the abuse of their joints in hard labor to cover the needs of their families. Irritable bowel disease is again of a relatively high rate at 2.7%; its relation to anxiety and stress is well known. The prevalence of diabetes is 5.2% which is near that of general population where it was reported to be 5.9%.



**Stress related with domestic duties:**

Unscheduled stressors may be highly disruptive and begin with their life events .For example, the life events involving role transitions or changes in status due to separation and divorce, the premature or untimely death or major injury or the onset of chronic illness or migration of male bread winner of the family may bring out serious stressors among women who are left behind in the family.

**Parental stress**

1. Difficulties in child care and supervision
2. Feel anxiety about the future of the children

It is widely suspected that with the absence of earning male member in the family gender related economic gap brings disadvantages in female headed households. Most of these women heads have double burden with domestic chores and income generating activities simultaneously and spend less time with their children than partnered mothers .

- **Cairney et al.(2005)** reported that single-parent families are more likely to suffer from depression than two-parent families, and that single-parent families have an elevated level of chronic stress, experience weak social support, and have infrequent contact with friends and families. The 2015 Single Parent Household Survey found that 20.2% of single parents experience depressive symptoms, with 54% coping with the symptoms on their own and a mere 5.7% seeking professional help.
- **Crosier et al.(2007)** suggested that single-parent households headed by mothers are more likely to experience poor mental health than two-parent households; and the most significant contributors to such mental health issues are economic hardship and a lack of social support.

**Positive Aspects of Being Female Household Heads**

- FHHs represent their families in all aspects....
- They decide domestic resources and assets
- they exercise full authority concerning financial matters and decision of households
- FHHs own good quality of managing household properties
- they face financial shortages, they have the ability to budget the incomes they obtain from diverse sources for household purposes economically and judiciously.

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