

Social Construction Of Motherhood And Importance Of Children: An Experience Of Childlessness Among Women In Kashmir.

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Abstract: *Motherhood is synonymously used for womanhood in our culture. It is considered a master status in our society and all other statuses of a woman revolve round the status of motherhood. Identity of a woman in our society is largely based on her capacity to bear children after marriage. The study attempts to describe the importance of motherhood and children from the viewpoint of childless women of our society.*

KEYWORDS: *Motherhood, Childlessness, Children, Childless Women.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally women are symbolized as the image of procreation. Motherhood is considered as a source of power and status to woman and is a developmental milestone in a woman's life that is highly honoured by our culture. Motherhood is the central gender expectation for a woman and is considered as the epitome of feminine fulfillment, the means by which women achieve full adult status and demonstrate their female identity (Ridgeway and Corell, 2004) (Kitzinger and Willmott, 2002). Women who have problems in conceiving find themselves as non-conformists in a dominant belief system that promotes motherhood as the most important role for women (Ulrich and Weatherall, 2000). Thus not giving birth to a child results in a sense of role failure which is proves to be very challenging for a female (Sundby, 1999). Within a pronatalistic ideological context, women unable to achieve motherhood are considered deficient, incomplete, or unfilled calling their gender into question. This provides a narrow view of women's social roles and worth and views them merely as breeders and child bearers (Parry, 2005). The lived experience of childless women is shaped by the culture and society they live in, thus becoming a mother is significant for all societies which value children as the essence of a family (Griel et.al, 2011) (Akarsu and Beji, 2019). Having children is the pinnacle of a relationship which strengthens the bond between husband and wife (Ulrich and Weatherall, 2000). Childbirth thus lends stability and security to the bride's relationship with other household members, whereas inferior status is accorded to one's who could not bear children, thus changing her status in marriage too (Patel, 1994).

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The universe of study consists of 60 childless/infertile women. The researcher has used primary data to collect the information from the respondents. Purposive sampling technique was used to collect the data from infertility clinics. Direct interviews were used to collect data from the respondents.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To identify the importance of motherhood in childless/infertile women.
2. To identify the importance of children in childless/infertile women.

IV. FINDINGS:**1.1 IMPORTANCE OF MOTHERHOOD:**

IMPORTANCE OF MOTHERHOOD				
S.No		CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY (N=60)	PERCENTAGE
1.	MOTHERHOOD IS AN IMPORTANT LIFE GOAL FOR WOMEN	AGREE	55	92%
		NEUTRAL	5	8%
		DISAGREE	0	0%
2.	MOTHERHOOD IS THE PRIMARY PURPOSE FOR ESTABLISHING A MARRIAGE	AGREE	53	88%
		NEUTRAL	7	12%
		DISAGREE	0	0%
3.	MOTHERHOOD IS A VITAL PART OF GENDER IDENTITY	AGREE	46	85%
		NEUTRAL	9	7%
		DISAGREE	5	8%
4.	MOTHERHOOD IS MORE VALUED THAN WIFEHOOD IN FAMILIES AND SOCIETIES	AGREE	43	72%
		NEUTRAL	8	13%
		DISAGREE	9	15%
5.	MOTHERHOOD BRINGS MORE ESTEEM AND RESPECT AT IN-LAWS	AGREE	42	70%
		NEUTRAL	10	17%
		DISAGREE	8	13%
6.	MOTHERHOOD STRENGTHENS THE HUSBAND-WIFE BOND	AGREE	42	70%
		NEUTRAL	6	10%
		DISAGREE	12	20%
7.	MOTHERHOOD PROVIDES A SECURE PLACE AT IN-LAWS	AGREE	39	65%
		NEUTRAL	8	13%
		DISAGREE	13	22%

SOURCE: FIELD STUDY

The above table shows the value motherhood holds in our families and society and the way it influences the lives of the childless women. The researcher has used a three point scale to record the answers of the respondents. The data reveals that 92 percent of the women agree with the statement that motherhood is an important life-goal for them, 8 percent of them were neutral about this statement, that is, they neither agreed with it nor did they fully

disagree with this statement. 88 percent of respondents considered motherhood to be a primary purpose for establishing a marriage while as 12 percent were neutral on the statement. 85 percent of respondents viewed motherhood as a vital part of gender identity and believed that childlessness questioned their identity as a woman, 8 percent among them disagreed with this statement and did not equate their gender with giving birth to a child, 7 percent of respondents were silent on this statement, they neither agreed nor did they disagree with this statement. 72 percent of women agreed with the statement that motherhood was more valued than wifehood in families and society, 15 percent of them disagreed with the statement and did not feel that they were valued lesser than those who had children, 13 percent of the respondents were neutral on the statement. 70 percent of respondents were of the view that motherhood brings more respect and esteem at in-laws, 13 percent felt that not having children does not affect their respect in their in-laws where as 17 percent were neutral on this statement. When asked whether the ability to become a mother affected the strength of the husband-wife bond, 70 percent of the respondents felt that motherhood helped in strengthening the husband wife bond while as 20 percent of the respondents did not feel it had any effect on their relationship and 10 percent of the respondents were neutral on the statement. 65 percent of women agreed with the statement that ability to become a mother provides a secure place at in-laws. They felt that one becomes permanent member at husband's family only after giving birth to a child. Some respondents were of the view that a woman gives roots at husband's place only after childbirth. 22 percent of respondents disagreed with the statement that motherhood provides a secure place at in-laws where as 13 percent of the respondents were neutral on this statement.

It is clear from the above data that majority of the respondents view the status of motherhood as extremely important for a female which gives identity and full social acceptance to her. The respondents agreed that the ultimate aim of a person after marriage is to give birth to a child. The reason for this is that in our culture, psychology promotes motherhood as extremely essential and a life goal for a woman.

1.2 IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN:

IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN				
S.No		CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY (N=60)	PERCENTAGE
1.	A CHILD GIVES A PURPOSE TO LIFE	AGREE	52	87%
		NEUTRAL	5	8%
		DISAGREE	3	5%
2.	A CHILD IS MUST TO CONTINUE THE FAMILY LINEAGE	AGREE	55	92%
		NEUTRAL	5	8%
		DISAGREE	0	0%
3.	A CHILD IS A SUPPORT FOR PARENTS IN OLD AGE	AGREE	54	90%
		NEUTRAL	4	7%
		DISAGREE	2	3%

SOURCE: FIELD STUDY

This part of the table deals with why one needs and considers children as extremely important in lives. 87 percent of the respondents agreed that a child gives a purpose to life and without a child life is meaningless while as 5

percent disagreed with it and 8 percent of the respondents gave a neutral response to this statement. They believed that children are no doubt very important in a person's life, but not having children does not mean that life comes to a halt, for example, there are many couples who do to have a child of their own, but one still learns to live and one can look for happiness in other things in life. The data depicts that 92 percent of the respondents believe that a child is needed to continue the family lineage, while as 8 percent gave a neutral response to it. They neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. They were of the view that they need a child primarily because they were feeling incomplete and lonely without it. Continuation of the family lineage was a secondary question. 90 percent of the respondents agreed that a child is needed because it is a support to parents in the old age while as 3 percent of the women disagreed with this statement and believed that children have their own lives, so one cannot say that one should have children to take care of their parents in old age. 7 percent of the respondents were neutral on the statement that children are needed because they provide a support to their parents in old age. They believed that it will be seen later on, depending on the circumstances.

The results show that majority of the respondents see children as extremely important in a person's life. The main reason for this is that, in our cultural set up not wanting children is viewed as pathological by the society, where as wanting to have children is seen as a normal behavior.

V. CONCLUSION:

Fertility is revered in almost all cultures and the ability to reproduce is perceived as a milestone in adult development (Notman, 1990). When cultural and societal values celebrate parenthood and reproduction, childlessness proves to be a stigmatizing status affecting the quality of life and identity of the childless person. Parenthood becomes the desired goal after marriage and appears to be a norm in a culture where a couple is expected to bear and rear children after marriage (Ulrich and Weatherall, 2000). Some may postpone pregnancy for a while but ultimately most people have life plans that include children at some point in their lives, whether driven by societal pressure, emotions or biology (Boivin, 2010). Childlessness has a profound impact on a woman's social status, self-esteem, dignity and personal relationships in such cultures, since these are closely related to her procreation potential in family in particular and society as a whole (Daar and Merali, 2002). A woman with no children represents the other in a culture where 'motherhood' is considered to be an essential component of 'womanhood' and childlessness as a generalized role failure.

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