_____

SELF-ESTEEM AMONG THE WIDOWS LIVING IN SLUMS OF CHENNAI – A STUDY

Baskar Jayabalan A.[1] and V. Sethuramalingam[2]
[1]Assistant Professor, Department of Service Learning, Loyola College, Chennai.
[2]Professor & Head, Department of Social Work, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli.

_____

ABSTRACT :

Aim: *The aim of this paper is to study the socio demographic characteristics and self-esteem of widows living in slums of Chennai city.* **Method:** *The researcher selected 281 widows as samples for the study by adopting simple random sampling technique. In order to measure the level of self-esteem the researcher adopted the self-esteem scale developed by Rosenberg. The reliability value for this scale is alpha 0.684.* **Result:** *The findings of the study indicate that the average age of the respondents is 43.2 years, with a minimum of 21 years to a maximum of 65 years. A little higher than half of them got married at the age of 17 years or less, and 39% of them were illiterates. The mean score of self-esteem was 14.69, which shows that the sample widowed women are at an average self-esteem level on the score range of 10 – 27. The mean score of self-esteem is observed to significantly increase with an increase in their age at marriage, level of education, monthly income, monthly family income, hours of work and size of the family, whereas it has showed a decreasing trend with an increase in current age.* **Conclusion:** *Steps must be taken to develop the self-esteem through counselling and psychotherapy to the widowed victims.*

KEYWORDS : *Widows, Slums. Self-Esteem,*

INTRODUCTION

In the Indian context, being a widow is terrible disadvantage. Since society is largely patriarchal, the passing away of the husband puts the woman in a precarious condition, as she is vulnerable to stigma and discrimination from several settings due to the cultural taboos followed against the widowed women. Because of these, the widowed women mostly have poor self-esteem. This is the common situation of widowed women in the case of those who belong to middle or upper middle class background; however, the situation of widows living in slums could be far worse as they are living in abject poverty. The term self-esteem comes from a Greek word meaning "reverence for self". The 'self' part of self-esteem pertains to the values, beliefs and attitudes that we hold about ourselves. The 'esteem' part of self-esteem describes the value and worth that one gives oneself (Kapotwe, 2012). Simplistically, self-esteem is the acceptance of our-selves for whom and what we are at any given time in our lives (Sue & Jo, 1975). Self-esteem refers to the

extent to which a person believes him/herself to be capable, significant, worthy, successful, and the extent to which a positive or negative attitude is held toward the self (Coopersmith, 1967: Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell, 1999). Self-esteem refers to an individual's sense of his or her value or worth, or the extent to which a person values, approves of, appreciates, prizes, or likes him or herself. Self-esteem is generally considered the evaluative component of the self-

_____

concept, a broader representation of the self that includes cognitive and behavioral aspects as well as evaluative or affective ones (Blascovich &Tomaka, 1991). One can judge the Self-esteem is based on value, their beliefs or interests, and the attitudes that they have (Beane, 1993).

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

Various studies have been conducted on the self-esteem of the widows. Fry (2001) carried out a follow-up study of 231 widows and widowers in three midsized cities of southern Alberta, results of the study show that in the case of widowers, education and income had positive and significant net effects on their HRQOL as well as SEI. Kermode and MacLean (2001) in their cross-sectional study among 757 participants indicated that negative self-esteem seemed to decline with age with a statistically significant difference occurring between the 18-24 age group and the over 75 years age group. Married have had higher positive self-esteem and lower negative self-esteem than those who were widowed and single or divorced. Baarsen (2002) conducted a study among 101 participants aged 55-98 and interviewed them before and after their partners' death. The findings showed that partner's loss lowered self-esteem, resulting in higher emotional loneliness and social loneliness, i.e., perception of less support. Widows, illiterates, dependents, people with no income, and a few other categories of the elderly. A study by Sethuramalingam, et al., (2010) indicated that the level of depression, anxiety and stress have had a negative correlation with the quality of life of widows. Sethuramalingam and Sathia (2011) in their study on 'widows in slums: living with families and alone', noted that the level of depression, anxiety, and stress were higher among those widows who were living alone than those widows living with their parents or in-laws. A study done by Mburugu et al. (2015) revealed variations in the widowed persons' self-esteem as a social effect of widowhood where widows showed lower self-esteem than widowers. Based on the review of earlier studies there are lack of self-esteem among widows especially the slum widows. A study conducted by Sethuramalingam and Sathia (2015) found that depression, anxiety, and stress were higher among those respondents who were 80 years or older, the review of previous studies reveal that here is no adequate study on the self-esteem of the widows living in slums. Hence, researcher has planned to do an in-depth analysis to investigate the correlates of socio demographic characteristics and self-esteem of widowed women living in slum areas.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives: The main objective of the research is to assess the level of self-esteem and its correlates with socio economic factors of widows living in slums of Chennai city. *Method*: The researcher selected Chennai city purposively, since it is a familiar place for the researcher. There were 15 zones with 200 wards in Chennai City with 1,329 slums of which the researcher selected the ninth zone by using the lottery method. The ninth zone comprises of 18 wards. Out of the 18 wards, the researcher selected one ward, namely, ward number 117, using the lottery method. Ward number 117 has 13 slums. For the purpose of data collection, the researcher decided to select all these 13 slums. As per the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board's report, it has 495 widows in all these 13 slums. The researcher selected 281 widows as sample for the study by adopting the Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula. This sample constitutes 56 per cent of the total widow population in the selected slums. In order to select the individual respondents, the researcher adopted the simple random sampling technique by using random number table. *Tools of data collection*: In order to measure the level of self-esteem the researcher used the self-esteem scale developed by Rosenberg (1965). The reliability value for this scale is alpha 0.684.   The study is descriptive in nature.

RESULTS

Socio-demographic characteristics: Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents revealed that majority of the respondents belong to the age group between 46 and 59 years. The average age at marriage computed is 17.6 years (ranging between 12 to 26 years). A greater percentage of them belong to Hinduism (83%) and majority of them belong to Backward / Most Backward Castes (55%). A large majority of their

family size is 3 or less (67%) and obviously, residing in nuclear families (68%). A greater percentage of them are working as housemaids (80%) and the rest of them are engaged in menial works. The average monthly income of the widows is Rs. 4155/- and the majority fall in the monthly income bracket of Rs. 3001-6000 (52%) and Rs. 1000-3000 (37%). A majority of them happened to become widowed at the age of 26-35 and 36-45 years (41% and 34%, respectively). When enquired about the reasons for their husbands' death, a greater percentage of them reported that it was due to deceases related to drinking alcohol (85%). A large majority of the sample respondents happened to stay alone after their husbands' death (62%) and about one-fourth of them resided in their in-law's house (26%). Information about the housing, amenities and related aspects revealed that about three-fourths of them (75%) own a house and a large majority of them are made up with tiled types (68%) that have mostly one living room only (66%). Being a slum area, a greater percentage of them depend upon public tap(s) for drinking water (82%).

Current Age and Self-esteem Score: From panel 1 of Table - 1, it is evident that the mean score of self-esteem of the respondents has consistently decreased with an increase in their current age. For instance, the mean score is as fairly high (15.49) among those respondents who belonged to the young adult age group (≤ 35 years), which has decreased to a low level of 13.37 when their age has increased 36-44 years, but such score reported to be somewhat higher among those who are in their late adult ages (45 years and above). These results show there is some sort of 'V-shape' relationship between the age group of respondents and self-esteem. In view of this inconsistent relationship, the ANOVA results too turned out **to be** statistically less significant (p<0.10).

Age at Marriage and Self-esteem Score: The mean score of self-esteem of the respondents is fairly much higher (16.28) among those who got married fairly at higher ages (22 years and above) than those who got married in the ages of 18-21 years and 17 or less years (14.26 and 14.59, respectively). However, differentials in the mean scores of self-esteem among those respondents are very minor and in fact the former score is little lower than expected (as compared to the latter one). However, broadly, the ANOVA results have supported the fact that the differentials in mean scores by age marriage of the respondents are highly significant (p<0.001). *Thus, the null hypothesis is negated here and supported the research hypothesis indicating that the extent of self-esteem is higher among those respondents who got married late (age-wise) than those who married relatively at an early age.*

Table - 1: Mean Scores of Self-esteem of the Respondents by their Background Characteristics

Selected Background Characteristics of Respondents	N	Mean	S.D.	d.f.	F / t – Ratio	p-value
1. Age						
Young Age (≤ 35)	51	15.49	3.749	2,	2.542	**0.10**
Lower Middle Age (36 – 44)	89	13.37	2.765	278		
Upper Middle Ages + (45 +)	141	14.61	2.610			
2. Age at Marriage						
≤ 17	150	14.59	2.984	2,	6.733	**0.001**
18 – 21	95	14.26	2.402	278		
22 +	36	16.28	3.360			
3. Age at Widowhood)						
≤ 25	38	15.05	3.586	3,	1.246	0.331
26 – 35	115	14.97	3.052	277		
36 – 45	96	14.35	2.462			
45 +	32	14.31	2.729			

4. Religion						
Hinduism	232	14.47	2.751	2,	6.154	**0.001**
Christianity	46	15.54	3.338	278		
Islam	3	19.00	3.464			
5. Caste						
SC	127	14.97	3.160	1,	2.068	0.152
BC/MBC	154	14.47	2.679	279		
6. Size of Family						
Small (≤ 2)	105	14.59	2.468	2,	3.456	**0.05**
Medium (3 – 4)	141	14.48	2.932	278		
Large (5 +)	35	15.89	3.756			
7. Education						
Illiterates	109	13.99	2.732	3,	3.824	**0.001**
Primary School	32	14.84	2.652	277		
Middle School	53	15.05	2.762			
High School and above	77	15.34	2.435			
8. Occupation						
Housemaids	231	14.45	2.751	2,	4.850	**0.01**
Street Vending	33	15.88	3.638	277		
Others	17	15.76	2.840			
9. No. of Hours Working						
≤ 4@	114	14.02	2.654	2,	7.130	**0.01**
5 – 7	123	14.91	2.788	278		
8 +	44	15.84	3.457			

Age at Widowhood and Self-esteem Score: Data provided in panel 3 of Table - 1, exhibit that the mean score of self-esteem has shown a consistent decreasing trend with an increase in their age at widowhood. The details revealed that the mean score of self-esteem is comparatively higher (15.05) among those respondents whose age at widowhood is 25 years and less, whereas such a score has decreased to 14.97 and then to 14.35, respectively among those who attained widowhood at the ages of 26-25 and 36-45, respectively, and further, it has reached to a low level of 14.31 among those respondents whose age at widowhood is fairly high (46 years and above). However, the ANOVA test results did not turn out significant in this regard and thereby, these results agreed with the null hypothesis.

Religion and Self-esteem Score: From the data presented in panel 4 of Table - 1, it is evident that the mean score of self-esteem is conspicuously lower among those respondents who adhere to Hinduism (14.47) as compared to those who have faith in Christianity (15.54) and Islam (19.0). However, the ANOVA test results revealed that the differences in the mean scores of self-esteem across the three religious groups of the respondents are highly significant (p<0.001). *Thus, one can conclude that there is ample support that religious background would play in differentiating the extent of self-esteem among the different religious groups.* Of course, the point to be borne in mind here is that respondents who belonged to Islam are very small and thereby, one has to be a little bit cautious in the generalization of this finding.

Caste and Self-esteem Score: It is interesting to note that widowed respondents have demonstrated a little higher mean score of self-esteem (opposite to the expected pattern) than those who belonged to BCs (14.97and 14.47, respectively). However, the ANOVA test results in this regard *didn't turn out as significant* even at the lowest level of 10 per cent and thereby, the data of this study didn't support the expected proposition in this regard.

Size of Family and Self-esteem Score: Information provided in panel 6 of Table - 1, exhibits that the mean score of self-esteem is markedly higher among those respondents who are from families of large-size (15.89) as compared to those who are from medium and small size families (14.59 and 14.48, respectively). The ANOVA test results too turned out as moderately significant (p<0.5) in this regard. Hence, *one may conclude that there is some support to the contention that higher the size of the family higher would be self-esteem among the members of this study, indicating joint families (mostly large-size families) are likely to induce higher self-esteem among the widowed women than those who are compared to nuclear families (medium and small-size families).*

Educational Attainment and Self-esteem Score: Empirical data of this study (panel 7 of Table - 1) highlights that the mean score of self-esteem is consistently increased with an increase in the level of education of the respondents. For instance, one can notice that the mean self-esteem score of the respondents is as low as 13.99 among the illiterate, which increased to 14.84 and then to 15.05, respectively, when their level of education increased to primary school and middle school, respectively and reached a higher level of 15.34 among those respondents who studied up to high school and above. The ANOVA test results also showed that the differences between the mean scores of self-esteem across respondents' levels of educational status are highly significant (p<0.001). Hence, it may be concluded that *the null hypothesis in this case is rejected and the research hypothesis viz., higher the level of educational status of the widowed (respondents) higher would be their level of self-esteem, holds good in the sample population.*

Occupational Status and Self-esteem Score: From panel 8 of Table - 1, one can notice that the mean score of self-esteem is pertinently higher among those respondents who are engaged in street vending closely followed by those engaged in other (better than street vending) occupations (15.88 and 15.76, respectively), whereas such a score is observed as the low among those who are engaged in housemaid work. Consequently, the ANOVA results also supported the fact that these differentials in mean scores of self-esteem, across the different occupational status categories are found to be at significantly higher level (p<0.01). Thus, *the hypothesis, higher the level of occupation of widowed women higher would be their self-esteem holds good (in the expected direction) in the study area.*

No. of Hours Working and Self-esteem Score: It is evident that (panel 9 of Table - 1) the mean score has increased progressively with an increase in their working hours. The details showed that the mean score of self-esteem is relatively low among those who are working just about 4 hours or less (14.02), than the other categories of the respondents. It is also obvious to note that the ANOVA results in this regard have turned out as highly significant (p<0.01). Hence, the results *rejected the null hypothesis and sustained the research hypothesis in the expected direction – higher the number of working hours higher would be their self-esteem.*

_____

Table - 2: Mean Scores of Self-esteem of the Respondents by their Background Characteristics

Selected Background Characteristics of Respondents	N	Mean	S.D.	D.F.	F / t – value	p-value
1. Monthly Income (in Rs.)						
≤ 3000[@]	109	14.06	2.720	2, 278	10.479	**0.001**
3001 – 6000	146	14.77	2.690			
6000 +	27	16.81	3.782			
2. Family Monthly Income (in Rs.)						
≤ 5000	96	13.78	2.032	3, 277	6.456	**0.001**
5001 – 10000	123	14.89	2.855			
10001 – 15000	46	15.57	3.500			
15001 +	18	16.19	4.324			
3. Receiving Widow Pension						
No	80	14.40	2.844	1, 279		
Yes	201	14.81	2.937		1.141	0.286
4. Have Savings						
No	240	14.50	2.684	1, 279	76.412	**0.001**
Yes	41	15.80	3.849			
5. Place of Stay						
Alone	171	14.75	2.936			
In-laws' Home	73	13.74	1.937	2, 278	10.196	**0.001**
Parents' Home	37	16.30	3.635			
Total	**281**	**14.69**	**2.912**	--	--	--

Monthly Income and Self-esteem Score: Data given in panel 1 of Table - 2 reveals that, by and large, the mean score of self-esteem has increased with an increase in their monthly income / earnings. The details demonstrate that the mean score of self-confidence is fairly lower (14.06) among those respondents who are earning quite low income per month (Rs. 3000 or less), whereas such a score increased to a moderate extent (14.77) and then to a substantially higher extent (16.81), when their personal earnings and incomes have increased to a moderate (Rs.3001–6000) and higher (Rs. 6001 & above) levels, respectively. The ANOVA test results too turned out as highly significant (p<0.001) in this regard. Therefore, it can be concluded that *the null hypothesis in this case is rejected and the research hypothesis, viz., higher the level of personal earnings / income of the respondents, higher would be their extent of self-esteem, holds good in the study sample.*

Family Monthly Income and Self-esteem Score: Information provided in panel 2 of table - 2 exhibits that, overall, the mean score of self-esteem has increased consistently with an increase in their family monthly income. For instance, it can be seen that the mean score of self-confidence is much low (13.78) among those respondents who belonged to lower family monthly income bracket (Rs. 5000 & less), whereas such a score has increased to 14.89 and then to 15.57, among those who belonged to moderate (Rs. 5001–1000) and little higher (Rs. 10001–15000) family income brackets, respectively. Apparently, the ANOVA test results turned out as highly significant (p<0.001) in this regard. Based on these results, one can arrive at the conclusion that *the null hypothesis in this regard is discarded and thereby, supported the research hypothesis, viz., higher the level of family monthly income of the respondents, higher would be their magnitude of self-esteem, in the sample.*

_____

_____

*Receiving Widow Pension and Self-esteem Score***:** It is clearly observed that (Panel 3 of Table - 2) the mean score of self-esteem is slightly higher among those respondents who receive widow pension (14.81) than those who didn't receive the same (14.40). However, the ANOVA test results didn't turn out statistically significant in this regard. Hence, it may be concluded that *the proposed null hypothesis in this regard has been approved, whereas the research hypothesis has not been sustained.*

*Have Savings and Self-esteem Score***:** Data provided in panel 4 of Table - 2 reveals that the mean score of self-esteem is fairly higher among those respondents who have some savings at the time of survey (14.80) as against to those who didn't have such savings (14.50). Further, the ANOVA test results also turned out as highly significant (p<0.001) in this regard and thereby, *the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis, viz., savings of the widowed enhances their extent of self-esteem, is accepted.*

*Place of Stay After Husband's Death and Self-esteem Score***:** panel 5 of Table - 2, it is observed that the mean score of self-esteem is quite high and at a moderate extent (16.30 and 14.75, respectively) their among those respondents who are staying with their parents and alone, respectively after husband's death, whereas such a score is much less in the case of those who are staying in their in-laws' home (13.74). It is also conspicuous to note that the ANOVA test results too turned out as highly significant (p<0.001) in this regard. Hence, *the null hypothesis in this regard is rejected and the research hypothesis is supported by the empirical data of this study.*

CONCLUSION

On the whole, economic factors appear to be highly associated / correlated with the self-esteem of the widows living in slums. Among these, with a few exceptions and as expected, *monthly income, family monthly income and having savings of the respondents,* in addition to *working for more number of hours* (proxy economic factor) have showed significant positive association / correlations with the self-esteem scale. These findings indicate that widows (respondents) who are economically better off are likely to have high self-esteem. On the social front, the education level of the girls should be given more priority so as to have boldness and courage during the periods of crisis of widowhood. In addition to this, through informal education, the widows may be imparted with knowledge related to different psycho-social problems that are likely to arise immediately after the death of their husbands and also about coping with strategies to be adopted to increase their self-esteem. Social workers also play a vital role in strengthening the family system through counselling and psychotherapy units that exist in urban areas for rehabilitation of the widowed victims.

REFERENCES

Baarsen, B. V. (2002). Theories on coping with loss: the impact of social support and self-esteem on adjustment to emotional and social loneliness following a partner's death in later life. *Journals of Gerontology*, *57*, 33-42.

Beane. (1993). Quoted in Yahaya, A. H., & Geok, Y. K. (2003). The development of self-esteem among school students. *The 4th Comparative Education Society of Asia (CESA) Biennial Conference to be held in Bandungon July 21-22, 2003*. Retrieved from http://epri nts.utm.my/6254/1/ AziziYahaya_ The_ Development_of_Self-Esteem_ among_ School_ Students.pdf

Blascovich, J., & Tomaka, J. (1991). Measures of self-esteem. In J. P. Robinson, P. R. Shaver, & L. S. Wrightsman (Eds.) *Measures of personality and social psychological attitudes* (Vol I). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Coopersmith, S.(1967). *The antecedents of self-esteem*. Freeman, San Francisco.

Fry, P. S. (2001). Predictors of Health-Related Quality of Life Perspectives, Self-Esteem, and Life Satisfactions of Older Adults Following Spousal Loss An 18-Month Follow-up Study of Widows and Widowers. *The Gerontologist*, *41*(6), 787-798.

_____

_____

Kapotwe, J.M. (2012). *What do you do when trouble comes?*. Bloomington: Author House.

Kermode, S., & MacLean, D. (2001). A study of the relationship between quality of life, self-esteem and health. *Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *19*(2), 33-40.

Kling, K.C., ShibleyHyde,J., Showers, C.J. and Buswell, B.N.(1999). *Gender differences in self-esteem: A meta analysis*. *Psychological Bulletin, 125*, 470-500.

Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970). Determining sample size for research activities. *Educational and psychological measurement*, *30*(3), 607-610.

_____