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Research Article

HOPELESSNESS AMONG TRIBAL WIDOWS-A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Background: India is a country with the highest numberof widows in the world (4.65 crores)and they are invisible and marginalised. It is assumed that the widows in the tribal community are highly marginalised which may lead to a state of despair and lack of hope. **Objectives:** To assess the hopelessness and its correlates with the background characteristics of the tribal widows and to identify the significant predictors of the hopelessness of the respondents.**Method:** A sample of 305 out of 487 tribal widows in the Idukki district in Kerala State were selected using a simple random sampling technique. The hopelessness of the tribal widows was measured using the hopelessness scale developed by Beck et al. (1974).

Result: The findings revealed that a little less than half (46%) of the respondents scored mild hopelessness. The respondents who scored moderate, high and within the range of hopelessness constitute 35 per cent, 16 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively.The regression analysis revealed that the current age (11.8%), education (7.5%) and family income (5.3%) became the principal predictors of hopelessness among tribal widows.

Conclusion: Findings reveal that there is a need for providing counselling to the tribal widows to cope up with daily life.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background: There are 245 million widowsin the world (Fields & Casper, 2001) which has increased to 258.5 million in 2017 (Batha, 2017). Almost one-half of women over the age of 65 years are widowed (Fields & Casper, 2001). In 2015, there were 4,64,57,516 widows in India, which is the highest number widow population in the world (The Loomba Foundation, 2021). Kerala has the largest widow population (6.67%) in India (Sivakumar, 2015).In India, there were 36,93,829 tribal widows and in Kerala, there were 27,885 widows who belong to the tribal community(Census of India, 2011).

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1.2 Previous Studies: Various studies have been conducted on hopelessness among widows. Atchley (1975) reported that widowhood is associated with inadequate income, lower social participation, and higher loneliness and anxiety among working-class women. Dunn (2015) illustrated that a higher level of loss- oriented coping among the younger widows was associated with a higher level of grief. Sethuramalingam and Sathia (2015) found that depression, anxiety, and stress were higher among those respondents who were 80 years or older, widows, illiterates, dependents, people with no income, and a few other categories of the elderly. Spahni et al. (2015) reported that lower depression hopelessness, loneliness, higher life satisfaction and better subjective health were associated with resilience in elderly respondents. Basu et al. (2018) found that one-fourth of the respondents felt depressed while, severe distress was found in one-fifth of the respondents, especially among the respondents aged above 70 years. Sahin et al. (2018) found that the elderly widows who have lower income and living in nursing homes face a higher level of hopelessness. Singh and Dewan (2018) reported that the level of depression and stress was found to be higher among tribal and older women when compared to non-tribal and younger tribal migrant rural women. The mental health among tribal migrant women was poor than the non-tribal respondents. The level of stress of the tribal women was 69 per cent, whereas it was 39 per cent among the non-tribal women. Jayabalan and Sethuramalingam (2019) found that the monthly and family income of the respondents, their savings and number of working hours showed negative effects in total hopelessness score. Widows who have lower economic status seem to have a high level of hopelessness. Also, the education of the respondents increases with the decrease in hopelessness. Respondents who reside in their in-law's house after the loss of their husband seem to have lower hopelessness.Reclin et al. (2019) reported that the respondents who scored higher in the level of education, personal and family income have a higher level of social support. The findings suggest proper guidance and counselling should be provided to the widows of alcoholics which will reduce their loneliness and lead them to increase their social networks.Mariaselvam et al. (2019) reported that female tribal respondents scored a higher level of hopelessness than male respondents. The hopelessness score is found higher among the married respondents than single. Illiterate and unemployed respondents have a higher mean score of hopelessness. The respondents whose family income ranging from Rs.5000 or less have a high mean score of hopelessness. The level of hopelessness is higher among the respondents whose family expenditure is Rs.2000 or less. The respondents who belong to the nuclear family have a higher mean score of hopelessness. Further, zero-order correlation shows that age is positively correlated with hopelessness, whereas, personal and family income and family expenditure of the respondents is negatively correlated with hopelessness.From the review of earlier literature, it is found that there have been no specific studies on hopelessness among tribal widows in India, as well as abroad.In view of this **research gap**, the researcher has proposed to conduct an in-depth study to examine the hopelessnessamong the tribal widows.

2. METHODS

2.1. Objective: The objective of the present study is (i) to assess the hopelessness and its correlates with the background characteristics of the tribal widows, and (ii) to identify the significant predictors of the hopelessness of the respondents.In order to measure the research objective, the researcher formulated a null hypothesis that 'there is no statistically significant

relationship between the background characteristics in the mean scores of the hopelessness of the tribal widows.

2.2. Research Design: The researcher has adopted a descriptive research design to describe the background characteristics and the significant predictors of hopelessness. The present research is also cross-sectional in nature since data were collected at only one point in time to assess the socio-demographic characteristics and hopelessness.

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: For the purpose of the present research the researcher includes the widows who belong to Hill Pulaya (Malapulayan), Muthuvan and Mannantribes in Devikulam block, Idukki district. The Devikulam block was selected where the concentration of tribal population found more in number. Moreover, there are other hill tribes in Devikulam block viz Malayaraian, Ulladan and Urali were not included in this research as they were very less in number.

2.4. Methods and Participants: There were 479 widows among three tribal communities of which the researcher selected 305 widows as a sample using the Krejcie& Morgan (1970) formula. The individual respondents were selected by adopting a simple random sampling technique using Tippett's random number table. Thus, the sample size constitutes 63 per cent of the total tribal widows.

2.5. Ethical Considerations: Official permission was obtained from the Director, Scheduled Tribes Development Department (STDD) of Kerala state. Permission was also obtained from tribal leaders in the study areas. The researcher assured the tribal leaders that the data collected will be used only for research purpose and will be kept confidential. Oral consent was also obtained from the respondent before the interview.

2.6. Methods of Data Collection: The researcher took about 3 months of time required for the collection of the data from the respondents during the months of April - May 2019. The researcher collected the required data with the help of interview schedules through a face-to-face interview with the respondents. The respondents were interviewed at their home and in their workplace. On average, fourrespondents were interviewed per day by the researcher with a duration of about 2 hours per person.

2.7. Tools of Data Collection: A semi-structured interview schedule was prepared to collect the personal information and socioeconomic conditions of the tribal widows. To measure **hopelessness** among the respondents, the 20-item scale developed byBeck et al. (1974) was used. The reliability (alpha) value of the hopelessness scalewas 0.744.

2.8. Analysis of Data: After the completion of the data collection, all the interview schedules were checked for completeness of respondents and edited carefully. To analyse the data, the researcher used SPSS software version-24 (IBM Corp., 2017). The analysis was carried out with the help of frequency distributions, one-way ANOVA, correlation and stepwise regression analysis.

2.9. Conceptual Framework: It is proposed to treat the hopelessness score as the dependentvariable and the background characteristics of the tribal widows will be used as independent variables.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Background characteristic of the respondent: The results shows that the average age of the respondents was 53 years with a minimum of 24 years and a maximum of 73 years.About 95% of the respondents belong to Hinduism. The average size of the family was 3.1 ranging from 1 to 8 members. More than half (57%) of the respondents belong to joint families. A majority (85%) of the respondents were illiterates. About 65 per cent of the respondents were engaged in agriculture.The average monthly family income of the respondents was Rs. 10,891 ranging from Rs. 1,900 to Rs. 42,490.The monthly per capita expenditure was Rs. 2583 ranging from Rs. 463 to 12,833. The majority (72%) have the habit of savings. About 73 per cent live in concretehouses.The average number of rooms in their houses was 2.93.The average number of mobile phones owned by the familyis 0.92 with a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 5.The average age at marriage of the respondents in the present research was 18.97 yearswith a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 30.The average age at widowhood was 43 yearswith a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 52.A little less than two-fifth (39%) of the respondent lost their spouses due to specific diseases followed by addiction to alcohol (18%), heart diseases (16 %), asthma (11%), accidents (9%) and suicides (8%).A little more than three fourth (78%) of them were living with their spouse's family while 16 per cent of them living with their own children and the remaining 6 per cent of them were living with their parents.

Table - 1: Mean score and one-way analysis values of hopelessness score of respondents by their demographic, socio-economic and widowhood related aspects

Variables	N	Mean	S.D.	df	F / t - value	p-value
1. Current Age (in years)						
Young	24	11.71	3.381	2	170.269	**.000**
Middle	191	7.37	2.608	302		
Old	90	13.84	3.031			
2. Tribe						
Hill Pulaya	118	9.08	3.589	2	36.689	**.000**
Muthuvan	144	8.74	3.870	302		
Mannan	43	14.05	3.139			
3. Size of Family						
Small (3 or <)	179	9.77	4.132	2	1.569	.210
Medium (4-5)	109	9.18	3.942	302		
Large (6 +)	17	10.88	4.182			
4. Type of Family						
Nuclear Family	132	9.67	4.271	1	0.163	.870
Joint Family	173	9.59	3.932	303		
5. Education						

Illiterates	258	9.71	4.103	2	0.398	.672
Lower Primary	34	9.29	3.920	302		
Upper Primary[@]	13	8.85	4.120			
6. Occupation						
Agricultural Labourers	108	10.55	4.143	1	2.967	**.003**
Agriculture[#]	197	9.12	3.958	303		
7. Annual Family Income (in Rs.)						
100000 or <	175	10.34	4.116	2	6.784	**.001**
100001 - 200000	66	8.83	3.921	302		
200001 +	64	8.47	3.750			
8. Annual Family Expenditure (in Rs.)						
40000 or <	64	11.28	4.165	2	8.083	**.000**
40001 – 80000	139	9.50	3.913	302		
80001 +	102	8.75	3.964			
9. Annual Savings (in Rs.)						
40000 or <	190	10.36	4.069	2	8.631	**.000**
40001 – 80000	59	8.49	3.748	302		
80001 +	56	8.32	3.890			
10. Ownership of Land						
Landless	48	10.75	4.087	1	2.099	**.037**
Land Owners	257	9.41	4.047	303		
11. Reason for Death of the Spouse						
Suicides	23	8.83	4.086	3	.790	.500
Addiction to alcohol	54	9.15	3.902	301		
Diseases	200	9.77	4.097			
Accidents	28	10.18	4.287			
12. Years of Family life with Spouse						
10 or <	33	9.97	3.980	3	8.862	**.000**
11 – 20	76	8.42	3.667	301		
21 – 30	106	8.96	3.767			
31 +	90	11.29	4.285			
13. Living Arrangements after the Death of Spouse (in Years)						
With Husband's Family	239	9.75	4.151	2	1.665	.191
With Parents	17	10.41	4.169	302		
With Children	49	8.71	3.582			

Current Age and Hopelessness Score

Panel 1 of Table 1 indicated that the mean score of hopelessness is lower among the middle age group respondents (7.37) when compared to young age (11.71) and old age group respondents (13.84). Moreover, the ANOVA test results show that there is a very highly statistically significant difference ($p<0.001$) between the age group of the respondents in the mean score of hopelessness. Hence, the null hypothesis that 'there is no statistically significantdifference between the age group of the respondents in the mean score of hopelessness' is rejected. Thereby, the research hypothesis is accepted.

Social Groupsand Hopelessness Score

Panel 2 of Table 1 revealed that Mannan (14.05) tribes have scored a higher mean score of hopelessness than Hill Pulaya (9.08) and Muthuvan (8.74) tribes. Further, the ANOVA test results show that there is a very highly statistically significant difference ($p<0.001$) between social groups of the respondents in the mean score of hopelessness. Therefore, the research hypothesis that 'there is astatistically significantdifference between the social groups of the respondents in the mean score of hopelessness' is accepted.

Size of Family and Hopelessness Score

The respondents who belong to large (10.88) size families have a higher mean score of hopelessness when compared to a small size (9.77) and medium-size (9.18) families (see panel 3 of Table 1). The size of the family increases with the increase in hopelessness. However, the ANOVA test results revealed that there is no statistically significant difference ($p>0.05$) between the size of the family of the respondents in the mean score of hopelessness. Therefore, the null hypothesis in this regard is accepted.

Type of Family and Hopelessness Score

The findings obtained in panel 4 of Table 1 highlighted that the mean score of hopelessness is higher among the respondents who belong to the nuclear family (9.67) than those who live in a joint family (9.59). However, the independent sample t-tests show that there is no statistically significant difference ($p>0.05$) between the type of family of the respondents in the mean score of hopelessness. Therefore, the research hypothesis that 'there is a statistically significant difference between the type of family of the respondents in the mean score of hopelessness' is rejected.

Education and Hopelessness Score

Panel 5 of Table 1 indicated that the respondents who were illiterates (9.71) have scored a higher mean score of hopelessness than those who have educated till lower primary (9.29) and upper primary (8.85). It is also noticed that the education increases with the decrease in hopelessness score. However, the ANOVA results turned out to be insignificant ($p>0.05$) between the education of the respondents in the mean score of hopelessness. Hence, the null hypothesis that 'there is no statistically significant difference between the education of the respondents in the mean score of hopelessness' is accepted.

Occupation and Hopelessness Score

The mean score of hopelessness in panel 6 of Table 1 is higher among the respondents who work as agricultural labourers (10.55) when compared to those who work as agriculturists (9.12). Moreover, the independent sample t-tests show that there is a highly statistically significant difference ($p<0.01$) between the occupation of the respondents in the mean score of hopelessness.

Annual Family Income and Hopelessness Score

The findings in panel 7 of Table 1 revealed that the respondents who earned Rs.1,00,000 or less (10.34) have scored a higher mean score of hopelessness than those who have earned Rs.1,00,001-2,00,000 (8.83) and Rs.2,00,001 and above (8.47). It is also observed that, as the

annual family income increases, the mean score of the hopelessness of the respondents' decreases. Moreover, the ANOVA test results showed that there is a very highly significant difference ($p<0.001$) between the annual family income of the respondents in the mean score of hopelessness. Therefore, the null hypothesis that 'there is no statistically significant difference between the annual family income of the respondents in the mean score of hopelessness' is rejected.

Annual Family Expenditure and Hopelessness Score

Panel 8 of Table 1 illustrated that the respondents whose annual expenditure ranging from Rs.40,000 or less (11.28) is higher in the mean score of hopelessness when compared to those whose annual expenditure is ranging from Rs.40,001-80,000 (9.50) and Rs.80,001 and above (8.75). The annual family expenditure of the respondents increases with the decrease in hopelessness. Further, the ANOVA results is a very highly statistically significant difference ($p<0.001$) between the annual family expenditure of the respondents in the mean score of hopelessness.

Annual Savings and Hopelessness Score

The mean score of hopelessness in panel 9 of Table 1 is higher among the respondents whose savings range from Rs.40,000 or less (10.36) when compared to those who save between Rs.40,001-80,000 (8.49) and Rs.80,001 and above (8.32). Higher the savings, lower the hopelessness. Moreover, the ANOVA test results revealed that there is a very highly statistically significant difference ($p<0.001$) between the annual savings of the respondents in the mean score of hopelessness. Hence, the research hypothesis that 'there is a statistically significant difference between the annual savings of the respondents in the mean score of hopelessness' is accepted.

Ownership of land and Hopelessness Score

The findings in panel 10 of Table 1 indicated that the respondents who were landless (10.75) have scored higher in the mean score of hopelessness than those who own the land (9.41). Further, the independent sample t-test reveals that there is a moderately statistically significant difference ($p<0.05$) between the ownership of land in the mean score of hopelessness. Therefore, the null hypothesis that 'there is no statistically significant difference between the ownership of the land of the respondents in the mean score of hopelessness' is rejected.

Reason for Death of Spouse and Hopelessness Score

Panel 11 of Table 1 illustrated that the respondents' spouses who lost their lives in accidents (10.18) have a higher mean score of hopelessness than those spouses who died of diseases (9.77), addiction to alcohol (9.15) and suicides (8.83). However, the ANOVA results show that there is no statistically significant difference ($p>0.05$) between the reason for the death of a spouse in the mean score of hopelessness, thereby resulting in acceptance of the null hypothesis.

Years of Family Life with Spouse and Hopelessness Score

The mean score of hopelessness in panel 12 of Table 1 scored a higher mean score of hopelessness to those whose years of family life with spouse ranging from 31 years and above (11.29) when compared to their counterparts. Moreover, the ANOVA test results showed that there is a very highly statistically significant difference ($p<0.001$) in the mean score of

hopelessness. Hence, the research hypothesis that 'there is a statistically significant difference between the years of life with a spouse in the mean score of hopelessness' is accepted.

Living Arrangements after the Death of Spouse and Hopelessness Score

Panel 13 of Table 1 indicated that the mean score of hopelessness is higher among the respondents who live with their parents (10.41) after their spouse's death when compared to those who live with their husbands' family (9.75) and with children alone (8.71). However, the ANOVA results revealed that there is no statistically significant difference ($p>0.05$) between the living arrangements after the death of a spouse in the mean score of hopelessness. Hence, the null hypothesis that 'there is a statistically significant difference between the living arrangements after the death of a spouse in the mean score of hopelessness' is accepted.

Table - 2: Zero-order correlations between background characteristics of the respondents and their hopelessness score

Variables	**Age** (1)	**Edu.** (2)	**Occ.** (3)	**FI** (4)	**FE** (5)	**AS** (6)	**FLS** (7)	**Hop.** (8)
1. Age	1							
2. Edu.	***-.692	1						
3. Occ.	*.116	*-.132	1					
4. Family Inc.	.089	-.064	***.464	1				
5. Family Exp.	.104	-.078	***.444	***.974	1			
6. Annual Sav.	.063	-.040	***.453	***.952	***.858	1		
7. FLS	***.742	***-.555	**.161	.106	*.127	.069	1	
8. Hop.	***.343	-.039	**-.168	***-.199	***-.185	***-.202	***.225	1
Note: FLS - Family Life with Spouse,Hop. Hopelessness, *** $p<0.001$, ** $p<0.01$, * $p<0.05$.								

The correlation analysis shows that current age ($r=0.343$, $p<0.001$) and years of family life with spouse ($r=0.225$, $p<0.001$), increases the hopelessness of tribal widows also increases. Further, occupation ($r=-0.168$, $p<0.01$), family income ($r=-0.199$, $p<0.001$), family expenditure ($r=-0.185$, $p<0.001$) and annual savings ($r=-0.202$, $p<0.001$) increase the hopelessness of tribal widows decreases.

Identification of major predictors of the hopelessness score

Table - 3: Results based on step-wise regression analysis on the Hopelessness score in Tribal Widows

Model	Predictors	R	R^2 x 100	ΔR^2 x 100	b	SE b	β	t	p
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
		Dependent Variable: Hopelessness Score							
1	(Constant)				2.326	1.167		1.992	.047
	Current Age	.343	11.8%	11.8%	.138	.022	.343	6.366	.000
2	(Constant)				-3.869	1.617		-2.393	.017
	Current Age	.439	19.3%		.244	.029	.606	8.468	.000
	Education			7.5%	.868	.164	.380	5.304	.000
3	(Constant)				-3.136	1.574		-1.992	.047
	Current Age				.252	.028	.626	9.014	.000
	Education	.496	24.6%		.865	.158	.379	5.463	.000
	Family Income			5.3%	-.000009	.000	-.231	-4.588	.001

In this part of the analysis, an attempt is made to examine the major predictors of the overall quality of life of the sample of tribal widows. That is to find out which of the background factors influence or show net effects on the overall hopelessness of tribal widows. For such an endeavour, it is felt that step-wise regression analysis would be more suitable and thereby, carried out the same. The results are presented in Table 3. The objective of the multiple regression analysis is to predict the changes in the dependent variable in response to changes in the independent variables. Independent variables are added as long as their partial correlation coefficients are statistically significant. Independent variables also would be dropped if their predictive power drops to a non-significant level when another independent variable is added to the model. With this method, one could extract the most predicted independent variables of the dependent variable under consideration (Hair et al., 1998).

Column 1 of Table 3 tells us the number of the model being reported in this analysis. Column number 2 shows the predictor variable (constant), current age, education and family income. The first variable (constant) represents the constant, also referred to in the textbooks as the Y-intercept, the height of the regression line when it crosses the Y-axis. In other words, this is the predicted value of hopelessness, when all other variables are 0 (IDRE, 2016).

The R^2 value, in column 4 which is a measure of how much of the variability in the outcome, is accounted for by the predictors (Field, 2009). Model 1 (in column 2) refers to the first stage in the hierarchy when current age is used as a predictor. For the first model (in column 4), its value

is 0.118, which means that the current age score alone accounts for 11.8% of the variation in the hopelessness score of tribal widows.

In the second model (with both current age and education), this value increases to 0.193 or 19.3% of the variance in hopelessness score. In the third model (current age and education, and family income), this value increases to 0.246 or 24.6%of the variance in hopelessness score. Therefore, whatever variables enter the model in step 2 accounts for an extra 7.5% of the variance in the hopelessness score. Likewise, step 3, accounts for 5.3% of the variance in hopelessness score (column 5 of Table 3).

The unstandardised beta (b) value in column 6 tells us about the relationship between hopelessness score and each predictor variables. If the b value is positive, we can tell that there is a positive relationship between the predictor and the outcome, whereas a negative coefficient represents a negative relationship (Field, 2009). For these data in table 3, the predictors' current age, and education of the tribal widows have positive b values (in column 6) indicating a positive relationship and the family income of the tribal widows have negative b values indicating negative relationships.

That is, if current age (0.626), and education (0.379) increases, the hopelessness score also increases, whereas the family income (-.000009) of the tribal widows increases with the decrease in hopelessness score.

The standardised beta (β) values (in column 8 of model 5 in Table 3) provide a better insight into the importance of the predictor in this model. The standardised beta value in column 8 of model 5 for tribal widows' current age 0.626, education is 0.379, and family income is -0.231. This tells us that the current age has slightly more impact on the model. The overall results provided in Table 3 suggest that the current age of the tribal widows turned out as the major predictor of their hopelessness score.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The results show that the average age of the tribal widows in the study area was 53 years.Their average age at marriage was 18.97 years. However, the early marriages (12%) were also reported in the study area. The majority of them were illiterates and school dropouts. Their level of education was less than the 1st standard. Most of them were engaged in agriculture. The average monthly family income of the respondents was Rs. 10,891.The majority of them live in government constructed concretehouses. Their average age at widowhood was 43 years. The minimum age at widowhood of tribal women was 20 years. Most of the tribal women lost their spouses due to specific diseases like jaundice, heart attack, asthma, besides addiction to alcohol, unintentional accidents and suicides. The majority of the widows are living with their spouse's family. The one-way ANOVA/ independent sample t-test shows that there is a statistically significant difference in the mean score of hopelessness across current age, social groups (tribes), occupation, family income and expenditure, savings, land ownership and years of family life with a spouse and not in the case of size and type of family, education, the reason for the death of spouse and living arrangements after spouse's death. The correlational analysis shows that age

and years of family life with a spouse were positively associated with hopelessness score, whereas, it is negatively correlated with occupation, family income, family expenditure andannual savings of the widows who belong to various tribal communities in the study area. The findings of the study also revealed that current age, education and family income were the principal predictors of hopelessness in the tribal widows.

As most of the tribal widows were illiterates and school dropouts, steps must be taken to provide formal education to the tribal women and adult education not only for the tribal widows but also covering all tribal people in the study area. Since most of them were engaged in agriculture, steps must be taken to introduce agriculture-related processing unit for the production of value-added products (particularly cardamom, pepper, ginger, lemongrass, coffee beans, vegetables etc.,) in order to increase their income. Awareness must be created among tribal people about the consequences of early marriages. As most of the spouses of tribal women have lost their lives due to specific diseases like jaundice, heart attack, asthma etc., there is a need for a periodical medical check-up in the tribal hamlets through mobile clinics. NGOs must be encouraged in the tribal areas to run deaddiction and suicidal prevention centres in order to prevent addiction toalcohol and suicides among the tribals.Since half of the tribal widows reported hopelessness, steps must be taken to provide counselling to them in the study area.

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