

# Stress among Working Widows and Widowers: A Comparative Study

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*Abstract— No one can escape from stress and it affects individuals across all age categories, sex, conditions, and may leads to many physiological as well as psychological issues. Death of the soul mate or life partner is a bad and stressful time for widows and widowers as they enter into a new phase of life and a challenging society. Stressful events are differently deal by Widows and widowers. Few of them being pressured and stressed about finding and getting a suitable work and job or a suitable remarriage if possible. Gender, age, culture, sex are the key factors of stress. The present research study was done to examine the Gender differences in perceiving stress among various types of environmental conditions and situations during the widowhood or widower hood. It was hypothesized that there would be no significant differences in gender regarding stress and widows would be higher on their stress level as compare to widowers. The sample consisted of 100 widows and 100 widowers of above 18 years from different areas of Haryana. Data collection was done by convenient sampling technique. Perceived Stress Scale by Cohen was used in the present study in order to assess the level of stress. Results revealed that widows perceived more stress as compare to widowers. Thus, widows perceived stress is more or high than widowers. Widows were suggested to get counseling by psychologist.*

*Index Terms- Individual Differences, Gender, Stressful situations, Widows, Stressful events.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Stress can be explained as the unable to deal and cope with an unwanted apparent fear and threat. An apparent threat can be real or imagined to individual's psychological, physical, emotional, behavioral and spiritual wellbeing or welfare which results in a series of physiological responses and other types adjustments.[1] Each and every individual have their own mode of coping with environmental changes, so the causes of stress can be different for each person. Stress is a broad and well known term and it can be worst or good. Although good stress positively compels individuals to action (e.g. to study for a competition of NTA Net exam or Ph.d Entrance exam, or a toddler learning new skills slowly), whereas worst or bad stress can results in negative feelings such as unwanted fear, shame, guilt, anger, lack of trust, anxiety and depression (e.g. the death of a life partner or loving family member). In comparison to good stress bad stress and tension can be acute or chronic in nature and may consequence to serious health illnesses and mental issues. Stress is unavoidable and unescapable phenomenon in every aspect of widows and widowers lives.[2] Stress is generally an emotional deviation of something that can be due to various types of reasons like death of a sexual partner or beloved soul mate. Widows and widowers are the sufferers of pain. Widows are usually deal with pressures related to earn basic fundamental things and to live with sufferings in the society. Stress is universal and no one can escape from stress and it affects the person not only physically but psychologically also. Death of the beloved intimate partner or life partner is a tremendous , unbelievable ,heart broking and

stressful time for widows as they enter into a new phase of life and a challenging rude( narrow minded) society or world. [3]To deal with bad stress in everyday lives, person can learn to cope with it by using various coping strategy or coping styles and healing techniques. Stressful events are differently handled by working and non-working widows and widowers. Few of them (widows) being pressured and stressed by family members about finding and getting a suitable work and job or a remarriage if possible. Gender, age, culture, sex are the basic factors of stress. Kitchlu's (1993) study among the widows from urban and rural areas of Delhi found that 78 percent of the widows started working after the death of their husbands due to sheer economic necessity. Among rural widows, 30 percent faced problem in getting jobs in comparison to 14 percent of urban widows who had better educational attainment. Further, it was also found that, the rural widows mostly depend on their own earnings or that of their children or if they work, generally work on the farm of the joint family or take up some casual work. [4] A good number of urban widows were interested in doing some remunerative work to support their families. In India, family is the most important traditional social institution, where everybody gets shelter and care whether it is a child, youth, disabled, ill, elderly, or widow. The family serves as a fundamental structure for living together intimately and sharing economic, social and emotional responsibilities. Family as an intimate group provides protection to the sick, economically inactive and the aged. Security and emotional satisfaction to the individual can be provided through a network of inter- personal relations, implicit reciprocal duties and obligations between the family members. But the

structural changes that have been taking place in the society and the gradual disintegration of the joint family system, resulting in the rejection and neglect of the aged. [5]

A study in Delhi (Soodan, 1975) revealed that 80 percent of the elderly widows were living with their sons. About one-half of the widows who do not have sons were staying with their married daughters, whereas about 10 percent reported to be living alone. Audi Narayana et al, (1997), in a study in rural Tamil Nadu, observed that elderly women/widowed tend to live substantially in large numbers as a single member family than that of men. [6] The possible reasons - not getting support from son(s), son(s) living in nearby towns for work, reluctant to live with married daughter, and adjustment problems or strained relations with daughter(s)-in-law. Singh's (1986) study on "Problems of Widowhood" found that about 85 percent of widows faced variety of financial problems. [7] A study on Kashivasi widows observed that more than half of the widows received no economic support from their parents or husband's family (Saraswati, 1988). About 60 percent of widows living in the joint families left their homes under compelling and painful circumstances. A majority of the relatives do not visit the widows. These painful experiences within the family seem to be a contributing factor to most widows for not to maintain any contact with family members. [8] Previous studies have been conducted on students belonging to specific vocational areas like nursing students, medical students and social work students ( D. L. Beck, R. Srivastava, Perceived level and sources of stress in baccalaureate nursing students, Journal of Nursing Education, 30(3), 1991, 127–133) and ( V. A. Clarke, and C. L. Ruffin, Perceived sources of stress among student Nurses, Contemporary Nurse, 1(1), 1992, 35–40.) However, not much work has been carried out on working and non working married women and widows with regard to their life satisfaction, stress and coping style, therefore the present study was undertaken with this perspective. [9]

**Objectives:**

1. To assess the level of stress in working widows.
2. To assess the level of stress in working widowers.
3. To assess the gender difference in the perception of stress.

Hypothesis: It was hypothesized that there would be no significant differences in gender regarding stress level. And widows would be higher on their stress level as compare to widowers.

**II. METHOD**

**Participants**

The sample consisted of 100 widows and 100 widowers of above 18 years from different areas of Haryana. The sample consisted of 100 widows and 100 widowers of above 18 years from different areas of Haryana. Data collection was done by convenient sampling technique.

**Design**

Comparative Study Design was used for the present study.

**Instruments/Materials**

Standardized questionnaire Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) by Sheldon & Cohen was used for collecting the data.

**Procedure**

Informed consent and rapport establishment were done. Then, questionnaire were filled by the participants. Participants were contacted personally. Help were provided to the participants in order to solve doubts related to the questionnaire filling. Then, results were analyzed.

**Statistical analysis**

Descriptive statistics like Mean and Standard Deviation were calculated and then t-test was also carried out for comparing working widows and widowers.

**III. RESULTS**

The main aim of the study was to compare the level of stress among working widows and widowers from different areas of Haryana. The raw scores were analyzed using the appropriate statistical method or analysis. Descriptive Statistics and t-test was used for computing results. The t-ratio was calculated in order to find out the significant difference between the means of groups on measured variable. The result of the study revealed that the working widows have more stress than working widowers. Thus, working widows scored higher on Perceived Stress Scale (t=2.99, p<0.1) in comparison to working widowers. High stress among working widows is due to the fact that working widows occupy in multiple roles which are inconsistent in nature and create conflicting situations. Working widows play many household responsibilities as well as a single mother caregiver. Indian society still demands the traditional roles of women as house maker or child care giver.

**Table: 1.1, N= 200, Working widows(100), Working widowers(100)**

Variables	Working widows		Working widowers		t ratio
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	
Stress or Perceived Stress	18.77	4.744	20.89	5.89	2.99**

t-value of significance at 0.5 level 1.97

t-value of significance at 0.1 level 2.60

**IV. DISCUSSION**

The main target of the present study was to find out the level of stress in working widows and widowers of Haryana. As per the hypothesis working widows score higher than working widowers in PSS scale. Marital status of the elderly

assumes special significance in the context of care in old age as it is known that those who are married fare better in all economic and social aspects than those who remain single. Though there are many studies on elderly in India, very few attempted to focus on elderly widows and widowers. In every age group, women experience more widowhood than men and in the middle-age group, nearly three times more than men. A survey on elderly in Kerala (Rajan et al., 1999) observed that a higher proportion of older women live more than ten years as widows. Widowhood influences the economic status of older women because they lack the opportunity to benefit from their spouse's earnings. Dreze and Srinivasan (1997) based on the National Sample Survey data on consumer expenditure examined the relationship between widowhood and poverty in rural India, found that widows are no more likely to live in poverty than non-widows, but because widows tend to live in households with fewer members, even small adjustments for economies of scale result in widows being significantly worse off than average. Kitchlu's (1993) study among the widows from urban and rural areas of Delhi found that 78 percent of the widows started working after the death of their husbands due to sheer economic necessity. Among rural widows, 30 percent faced problem in getting jobs in comparison to 14 percent of urban widows who had better educational attainment. Further, it was also found that, the rural widows mostly depend on their own earnings or that of their children or if they work, generally work on the farm of the joint family or take up some casual work. A good number of urban widows were interested in doing some remunerative work to support their families. In India, family is the most important traditional social institution, where everybody gets shelter and care whether it is a child, youth, disabled or widow.

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