



Women Desertees: Post-Desertion Problems

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Available online at: www.isca.in

Received 25th October 2012, revised 2nd November 2012, accepted 15th December 2012

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to highlight and analyze the post-desertion problems that the women desertees encounter after desertion. To be specific, the objectives were: to know the accommodation pattern of desertees and their financial problems; to know their attitude towards remarriage; to know the problems of mothers with regard to raising children; to know the public attitudes towards women desertees and to know whether working women are exploited at the work place. The data were collected by interviewing a sample of 400 women desertees selected from all over the district. The data revealed that 55 and 45 percents stayed with their parents and kins and in rented houses, respectively. Most of the respondents were poor. They were working as labourers. It was observed that except 25 percent, 30 and 45 percents of them had indifferent and unfavourable attitude towards remarriage. Raising of children was a big problem. Women desertees were looked down upon by the public and were sexually exploited by the contractors, supervisors and owners of households. In short, the post-desertion status of the respondents is poor, low and humiliations.

Keywords: Women desertees, post-desertion problems

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to highlight and analyze the post-desertion problems that the women desertees encounter after desertion, and stress for appropriate intervention measures for their rehabilitation

Universe and Sample: The study was conducted in Bijapur district of Karnataka. A sample of 400 was selected from 4000 women desertees spread over in the universe. Information was collected through personal interview by using an interview schedule.

Earlier Studies: Practically there are no studies on woman desertion; women desertees and their post-desertion problems. There are a few studies, however, on divorce in India^{1,2,3}. However, a few articles have been published on deserted women.

A significant study was undertaken by Vidya Srinivasan⁴ on "Deserted Wives in the Slums of Madras City." The main objective was to describe the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents; to identify certain relevant features of their marital and abandonment history and to ascertain how these women were coping with their abandoned status. Seema Kulkarni and Sneha Bhatt⁵ undertook a research project on deserted women and wrote an article on "Issues and Concerns of Deserted Women." The main reason for woman desertion was maladjustment between newly married women and the family. Singh⁶ in his book: *Deserted and Divorced Women in Contemporary Society* has dealt with the different

problems of deserted/ divorced women. The basic objective of this study was to make a thorough empirical probe into the present status of the respondents. Obviously, there is a need to study the post-desertion problems of women desertees and propose appropriate interventions to rehabilitate them.

Plight of Deserted Women

Although desertion accounts for one of the most serious types of broken families, surprisingly little research has been undertaken concerning the major consequences of this kind of marital disruption and the various role adjustments it requires on the part of the families involved. Although such consequences and adjustments are in many ways similar to those involved in divorce, in some ways they are different⁷. The deserted wife, for example, is in the highly frustrating position of having a legal husband but one who is not physically available, and she may be in this position for a considerably long period of time. Legally, she cannot remarry until a divorce is obtained or her husband dies. Women who have been deserted experience varying degrees of role ambiguity emanating from vague and contradictory normative expectations concerning appropriate behavior. The manner in which they resolve this ambiguous social situation represents an important area for empirical enquiry⁸.

India is a welfare state, providing welfare services to the weak, handicapped, displaced and disadvantaged.

Shyamala Pappu⁹ in her article "Welfare of Deserted Separated and divorced Women" discusses the problems of these socially

disadvantaged women. According to her, the most basic and the foremost problem that these women face is the problem of social insecurity and loneliness. Deserted women come across other problems too, of accommodation, raising children, etc.

The objectives of this paper are: i. To know the accommodation pattern of desertees and their financial problems, ii. To know their attitude towards remarriage, iii. To know the problem of mother-respondents with regard to raising children, iv. To know the public attitudes towards women desertees, and v. To know whether working women are exploited at the work place.

Accommodation: Accommodation is the most important problem that most women divorcees/ desertees face. Desertion makes women homeless and houseless. Accommodation becomes a source of tension.

Table-1
Respondents Accommodation Pattern

Accommodation	No.	%
Parents/ Kin	220	55
Rented house	180	45
Total	400	100

It could be seen from table-1 that 55 per cent of the respondents lived with the parents/ kin while 45 per cent lived in rented houses. Those who lived in rented houses experienced more insecurity than those who lived with parents/kin.

Financial Problems of Deserted Women: Although, a majority of the respondents were working on daily or contract or salary basis, their financial condition was very weak and pitiable. A large portion of the earnings was spent on food, shelter and medicine. A majority of them were under debt.

Single mothers in India are economically disadvantaged. Studies of windows^{6, 10-13} and divorced or separated women^{2-4, 14} show that the financial problems of single mothers are severe. Many live at a bare subsistence level and face continuing difficulties in providing food, clothing and shelter for themselves and their children. Pothan¹⁴, for example found that women were considerably more likely than men to experience financial hardship following divorce/ desertion.

Attitude towards Remarriage: The consequences of desertion are many and grave. Between the birth and death of a person, the most important event in life is marriage. Marriage changes the personalities, the attitudes and the life-style of men and women. Young men and women enter into marriage with great hopes and expectations. Desertion is the failure of marital life, and therefore, it has serious repercussions on the individual, family and the community. Studies have shown that desertion has more negative than positive effects. The negative effects are more severe for the wife than for the husband¹⁵.

Problems of desertion are entirely different from that of divorce. A divorcee is legally free to remarry whereas a desertee is not.

Table-2
Attitude towards Remarriage

Attitude	No.	%
Favourable	100	25
Indifferent	125	30
Unfavourable	175	45
Total	400	100

According to some exploratory research undertaken by Locke and Klauaner¹⁶, divorced/ deserted – remarried women are good risks in their subsequent marriages as women marry who only once, whereas, divorced/ deserted remarried men are not as good risks as men who marry only once.

According to the respondents, a majority (80%) of their husbands got remarried. Only a few (20%) could not as they were fed up with marriage and women.

Data presented in table-2 shows that 45 per cent of them were unfavourable to remarriage, 30 percent indifferent, but only 25 per cent favourable. Of the unfavourable (175: 45%) 122 or 70 per cent believed in marriage as a sacrament. They said a *pativrata* marries only once in life. Remarriage is a sin or curse. The remaining 30 per cent preferred to remain unmarried.

Of the 30 per cent who were indifferent towards remarriage gave the following reasons: No use of remarriage (20%), Remarriage affects the children (56%), Remarriage is harmful (25%).

It is clear from the above analysis that a majority of the respondents were not ready to remarry on grounds of the sacramental character of Hindu marriage stigma of remarriage and problems of children.

An important observation was that a majority of the respondents were not aware of divorce rules. Neither had they wanted divorce from their husbands or alimony. They were totally indifferent about their husbands and cursed their fate.

Woman Desertion and Children: Probably the greatest area of social concern in the case of desertion is its effects on children. Asutosh Mookerjee¹⁷ in his book *Marriage, Separation and Divorce* deals with the impact of marital separation of spouses on children. By and large, deserted/ divorced women do not remarry whereas deserted/ divorced men do remarry. Young women are easily available for remarriage for men. But the same is not true of women. Thomes¹⁸ in a recent study examined the impact of the absent – father family on sons and daughters.

The main objective of this section is to examine the problems encountered by mothers in socializing or rearing their children by reference to sex and age.

Family and Socialization of Children: The term “family” for the present purpose is understood as a group of parents – both mother and father – living together in a household. Such a family is called “Full-Family” (FF). A family which consists of mother and children is called “Half-Family” (HF)

Functions of the Family: The family regulates reproduction and provides training in communication and cooperation. It also supplies certain highly valued immediate services and satisfaction, such as cooperative pursuit of the physical necessities of life, protection, affection, sexual gratification, and satisfaction of gregarious cravings.

Kingsly Davis¹⁹ has categorized the main social functions of the family into four classes viz., Reproduction, maintenance, Placement, and Socialization of the young.

Ogburn and Nimkoff²⁰ divided family functions into six categories. Affective, Economic, Recreational, Protective, Religious and Educational. MacIver and Page have given a two-fold division of the family functions: The essential, The non-essential.

Under the first are included: Stable satisfaction of sex needs, Production and rearing of children, and Provision of a home.

Under the second are included: Religious, Educational, economic, Health, and Recreation

Socialization of Children: A Basic Function

Of all the functions, socialization of the children occupies the foremost place. Socialization is a process through which the ego develops its own self and identity and thereby integrates itself to the external world. Lack of proper socialization leads to broken identity.

Of course, the family – both husband and wife- plays a significant role in rearing the child. Even so, of all the members, the father plays a crucial role in rearing the children. The father represents power and authority, a social and religious head. Obviously, absence of father means, lack of proper socialization.

Socialization of children in a broken or half-family (HF) assumes a challenging task for the mothers. The available literature on juvenile delinquency and prostitution shows that most of them are drawn from deserted families.

It has been already pointed out that of the 400 respondents, 257 or 65 per cent had children. Details of the children by age and sex are given below.

Data presented in table-3 show that of the respondents who had children 60 and 40 per cents had males and female children, respectively.

Table-3
Details of Respondents with Children by Age and Sex

Age group (years)	Gender					
	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
5 – 9	100	64.00	70	70.00	170	66.00
10 – 14	50	32.00	20	20.00	70	27.00
15+	7	4.00	10	10.00	17	7.00
Total	157	100.00	100	100.00	257	100.00
%	-	60	-	40	100	100

An age-wise distribution of the children shows that 66 per cent had children in the age group of 5-9 years. The remaining 27 and 7 per cents were from 10-14 and 15+ age group. It is clear that an overwhelming majority (66%) had children of school going age.

Data further show that of the males (157/60%), 64 per cent were in the age group of 5-9 years. Similarly, of the girls ((100/40%) 70 per cent were from 5-9 years age group.

Data further show that of the respondents, 27 per cent had children from 10-14 years of age. Only 7 per cent had children from the 15+ age group. It could be further seen that of the male and female children 32 and 20 per cents were from 10-14 years of age group, respectively.

It is clear from the data that a majority of the respondents had problems of sending children to school.

Education of Children: Desertion brings in its wake a number of problems not only for the parents but also for the children. Kingsley Davis¹⁹ holds that divorce/ desertion is a more serious problem in single families (only mother and children) than in joint families or parents supported families. Thakur²¹ found that most children of women divorcees were delinquents and vagabonds. It was very difficult for the women to manage their children.

Children Attending Schools: This section deals with the question whether children of the respondents attend schools. It should be emphasized here that in a family the presence of the father plays a great role in socializing children and controlling the family members.

J.N. Choudhary²² in an article *Children in Single Parent Families* deals with the problems that children face in single parent families. It is observed that children of the divorced/ deserted face economic stress. Children raised in single parent families’ score lower than the children of two parent families. A study by Amato and Keith²³ shows that adults who grew up in single parent families, compared with those from two-parent families, obtained lower educational qualification, worked in lower status occupations, earned less income and enjoyed a lower standard of living. It is generally accepted that divorce/

desertion is bad for the children and it has been supported by many research studies^{3,10,23,24} that children from disrupted marriages were more likely than others to be delinquent, psychologically disturbed and low achieving.

Table-4
Children Attending Schools

Response	Gender					
	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	57	36.00	20	20.00	77	30.00
No	100	64.00	80	80.00	180	70.00
Total	157	100.00	100	100.00	257	100.00

Data presented in table-4 show that of the respondents who had children, the children of 30 per cent they attended school, while of the 70 per cent did not. More boys (36%) than girls (20%) attended school, while more girls (80%) than boys (64%) did not attend school. It was further observed that 78 per cent of the mothers felt that it was difficult to manage the children.

The growing necessity of economic independence of women and their increasing participation in the democratic process and control over their own lives have caused negligence towards the children. A deserted woman has to manage her family finances, domestic chores and guests. Consequently, the child at times remains alone at home. As is indicated in the study of Leela¹² 71 per cent of single deserted mothers reported problems in bringing up their children alone. According to these women, the demands of employment plus house work very often compelled them to neglect their children. Their financial problems limited their children's chances of getting even primary education.

Public Attitude towards Women Desertees: This section deals with public attitude towards women desertees.

Women, compared to men desertees encounter more insult, hatred and humiliation in family, neighbourhood and the public at large.

Pothen¹⁴ has analyzed the reactions of the community towards divorcees. It should be noted that a woman desertee is looked upon as the one who has deceived her husband and his family. Her natal family also does not welcome and support this state of affair willingly. Gossip in all its poisonous and malicious forms is an irritating and often dangerous bug-bear to the divorced/deserted. Tongues wag, no matter how innocent he or she may be of any moral turpitude (Pothen, 1986; 196).

According to Pothen¹⁴ there are two types of reactions: (1) Sympathetic or partially sympathetic and (2) hostile or indifferent.

Deserted women are normally looked upon as maladjusted, perverted and delinquent. Socially and religiously they are

segregated, isolated and alienated. Public attitude towards deserted women are given in table-5.

Public reaction is divided into: Doubt and suspicion, Dislike and hatred, and Taunting and humiliation

Table-5
Public Attitude towards Deserted Women

Response	Family		Neighbourhood		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Doubt and suspicion	260	65.00	280	70.00	302
Dislike and hatred	250	63.00	270	68.00	320	80.00
Taunting and humiliation	280	70.00	290	73.00	350	88.00

Note: Multiple choice (n=400)

Doubt and Suspicion: Deserted women are often looked upon with doubt and suspicion. Their movements are keenly observed. They are treated as sexually 'bad' and might develop illicit relationships with young men in the family or neighbourhood. Data presented in table-7.5 show that 65, 70 and 76 per cents of the respondents are doubted and suspected in the family, neighbourhood and at work places, respectively. Doubt and suspicion were exhibited in their look and behaviour of those who watch a desertee's movements.

Dislike and Hatred: Public reaction was reflected in the form of dislike and hatred. Data collected in this regard show that 63, 68 and 80 per cents of the respondents in the family, neighbourhood and at work place respectively disliked and hated the desertee. Most members in the family avoided association with desertees.

Taunting and Humiliation: Most members often faced taunting and humiliation from the public. Data show that 70, 73 and 88 per cents of the respondents were subjected to taunting and humiliation. Choudhary³, writing about divorced women, says: "She cannot make friends with her male colleagues, nor with married couples as other women consider her to be a 'husband snatcher'. Hence, she has to confine herself to a social circle consisting of elderly couples, single women or widows (158),

In short, women desertees are greeted with an unfavourable attitude from the family, neighbourhood and co-workers at the work place.

Sexual Harassments and Exploitation: Deserted and divorced women, especially if without children, are treated as an easily available sexual commodity. It was observed that male members in the family tried to have sexual contact with the women desertees. This was more so at the work place. Men at work places talked loosely using words about sex. They also indirectly invited them for sexual activity. It was observed that a few desertees fell a prey to sexual enticement.

In short, desertion brings in its wake several social, economic and sexual problems to women.

Conclusion

This paper has dealt with post-desertion problems of women desertees under study. The main findings are: i. Fifty five (55%) and 45 per cents lived with parents and in rented houses separately. ii. Forty five (45%), 30 and 25 per cents expressed unfavourable, indifferent and favourable attitudes towards remarriage. iii. A majority of the respondents felt difficulties in raising children. iv. Most respondents in the family, neighbourhood and at the work place were disliked, taunted and talked ill of behind the back. v. Women desertees were subjected to sexual harassment and exploitation.

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