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## **A Theory-based Evaluation of the Causes and Consequences of Women-Headed Households in Vellore Town**

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### **Abstract**

In most nations, women are not regarded household heads until there is no adult male living continuously in the home. In India, a female headed household is described as one in which the woman is the primary breadwinner due to divorce, separation, immigration, or widowhood. Housewives are one of society's most disadvantaged groups, facing a slew of barriers, limits, evils, and hardships. Women-headed homes are more than twice as likely to be impoverished as all other households. Respondents' households face a variety of issues, including poverty, economic insecurity, social and political impotence, and health concerns. Despite this, women-headed households have a significantly lower standard of living than their male-headed counterparts. As a result, this research is particularly focused and relevant to the current situation, as well as socially and timely important one and need of the hour.

**Keywords:** Women-Headed Households, Poverty, Economic Insecurity, Health Issues, Standard of Living Index and Family Structure.

### **1. Introduction**

Family structure has influenced a range of interconnected aspects in India, including economical, educational, political, psychological, legal, and demographic issues like population growth, immigration, and urbanization. Allow us to consider the many stages of industrialization, urbanization, and transition as factors impacting current household arrangements. The terms single mother and sole mother are used interchangeably in different countries to describe the same family structure.

In most nations, women are not regarded household heads until there is no adult male living continuously in the home. Bias against women is the assumption that a typical household leader is always an adult person, even when a woman's financial contribution to the household's maintenance is considerably greater than a man's. In developing countries, more and more women are becoming the principal source of financial support for their families.

A household in which the lone or primary income provider and decision-maker is an adult woman. A female family in India refers to a woman who is in charge of the household relationship breakdown, detachment, economic migration, or death of a spouse. Women-headed households are one of society's most vulnerable groups, facing a variety of difficulties, limits,

evils, and challenges. As a result, the goal of this research article was to look into the causes and consequences of women-headed families in Vellore, Tamil Nadu.

Due to divorce, spouse death, husband addiction or incapacity, higher life expectancy among women, migration, or being alienated by husband, the number of women-headed families has increased dramatically in the last half-century, primarily in developing countries like India. Women's households face a variety of challenges that can pose a significant risk. As a result, their physical condition can be improved during the preparation process by assisting them in becoming accustomed to new and extensive responsibilities, as well as providing greater financial assistance and assisting them in improving their societal status. Scarcity and poverty are the causes of starvation, famine, and food insecurity.

Women are more likely to be disadvantaged as a result of gender partiality and a variety of racial and ethnic discriminations. Women-headed homes are more than twice as likely to be impoverished as all other households. Poverty, economic insecurity, social and political impotence, and health issues are among the issues that respondents' households face.

Their children, on the other hand, face poverty, famine, hunger, social, undernourishment, and health issues. A variety of factors contribute to rural poverty, including a harsh environment and inadequate infrastructure. Women-headed households, children, and ethnic, religious, or national minorities are more likely to face disadvantage. Women-headed families are poorer than male-headed households in general, according to poverty criteria that are purposely focused on housing conditions. Nonetheless, female-headed households have a marginally worse standard of living than male-headed households, according to the standard of living index.

### *1.1: Statement of Research Problem*

Tamil Nadu is one of India's most prosperous states in every way. In the contemporary age, women in India were awarded independence as well as rights such as freedom of expression and equality, as well as the right to education. During this time, women played a number of important roles. Their status in society worsened in India's early years, and their servitude was reified far into India's early modern era, particularly in Indo-Aryan regions. Vellore is one of Tamil Nadu's fastest-growing districts. The Vellore metropolitan region is a densely urbanized metropolis in the process of social and economic growth in the district.

The Vellore district had a population of 1,614,242 persons according to the 2011 census, with a female-to-male ratio of 1,007, which was much higher than the national average of 929. A total of 432,550 children under the age of six were counted, with 222,460 boys and 210,090 girls. Scheduled Castes and Tribes made up 21.85% of the total population and 1.85% of the total population, respectively. The literacy rate in the district was 70.47 percent, lower than the national average of 72.99 percent. In the district, there were 929,281 families. There were 153,211 cultivators, 254,999 main agricultural labourers, 106,906 in household industries, 845,069 other workers, 329,145 marginal workers, 21,897 marginal cultivators, 136,956 marginal agricultural labourers, 29,509 marginal workers in household industries, and 140,783 other marginal workers. Women's education, health, and training are promoted by a variety of

women's groups in Vellore. Vellore has a population of 185,803 people, with 241,201 men and 243,489 women in the urban metropolitan area.

As seen by their later marriage age, reduced fertility, greater work rates, and increased family headship, women's thoughts and ties to family roles have shifted considerably. They are significant members of their households not only as wives and mothers, but also as breadwinners and family leaders. Households in India are changing dramatically, with rising divorce and separation rates, family violence, inter - generational disputes, social issues such as drug abuse and delinquent behavior, and so on. These changes involve an inability to deal with the stresses of contemporary civilization. The debate about how women are treated at work has recently reached a head, and senior leaders, both men and women, are becoming more public about their commitment to gender balance.

Many of the debates, as well as many of the corporate activities, are predicated on the false premise that men and women are fundamentally different. Of obviously, biological differences exist. However, these aren't the distinctions that are usually discussed. Instead, the discourse focuses on the idea those women's attitudes, behaviours, and dispositions are fundamentally different from men's. A number of expected differences explain women's failure to achieve parity with men. Women negotiate poorly, lack confidence, are risk-averse, and fail to put in the required hours at work because they value their families more than their careers.

Men and women have a lot of differences, but meta-analyses show that they are substantially more similar in their inclinations, attitudes, and skills than popular thinking would have us believe. Gender disparities can be seen in a variety of settings, including the workplace, but they are not based on permanent gender features. Gender differences can be made to appear normal and inescapable by focusing on them. Gender inequalities are reinforced and take on a decisive aspect as anecdotes that conform to stereotypes are shared and repeated without addressing why and when stereotypical behaviour emerges. Then, rather of addressing the conditions that lead to such behaviour in the first place, well-intentioned but generally ineffectual measures focus on healing or pleasing women.

Due to divorce, spouse death, husband addiction or handicap, increasing life expectancy among women, migration, or being abandoned by husband, the number of female-headed families has increased dramatically in the previous half-century, particularly in Vellore town of Vellore District in Tamil Nadu. A range of reasons contribute to rural poverty, including bad weather and inadequate infrastructure. Disadvantaged people, such as women-headed households, children, and minorities of colour, ethnicity, religion, or nationality, are disproportionately affected. The majority of women-headed households (46%) earned money through earnings and salaries, with 15% earning money through entrepreneurial activity. According to poverty estimates based on housing circumstances and wealth indices, women-headed households are less destitute than male-headed households. Women-headed households are marginally poorer than men-headed households, according to the standard of living index. Women's ability to keep house and family influences gender-based injustices and inequalities between women and their motherhood, as well as the gender division of labour. One of the study's most intriguing findings is the

prevalence of intra-family conflicts in female-headed families, which has gotten less attention in previous studies.

The relatives of the departed husband limit the freedom of female-headed families. As a result of this arrangement, the female head of household and her husband's family and children almost always fight. Reaching an agreement is tough, and women are powerless, due to the large number of people willing to make decisions. Women's households in this study reported high levels of family stress and a lack of parental control over their children.

### *1.2: Questions for investigation*

- ❖ What challenges did you experience while assuming control of the household?
- ❖ What differences have you noticed in your role as the head of a family as a woman?
- ❖ When your husband died, did you notice any changes in your household?

### *1.3: Objectives*

The overarching purpose of this research is to investigate the antecedents and outcomes of women's headed households in Vellore town, Vellore district, Tamil Nadu, from a methodological perspective.

## **2. Review of Literature**

**Elizabeth Arias et. al. (1999)**, In addition to fewer educational and employment possibilities, children raised in female-headed households endure unfavourable social and economic implications throughout their lives. Because they do not have the same breadwinner function as men and often work at lower levels, women are naturally paid less and are more likely to be impoverished.

**According to LE Tower & MG Alkadry (2008)**, woman households faced social issues in addition to individual and familial concerns. One of the difficulties that woman homes are concerned about is the label of being unattended.

**Mary Paula Arends-Kuening et.al. (2006)**, Conflicts and impediments arose between women-headed households and their children. The challenges faced by a woman in charge of a household, particularly in a male position, result in both the woman's incapacity to fulfill her tasks and the children's disobedience. Male domination and cultural attitudes are to blame for this issue. Males have authority and guardianship, according to sociability.

**Lebni Yoosefi et. al., (2020)**, Female-headed families were identified as a vulnerable group Many economical pressures and a lack of supportive organisations present a bevy of obstacles for female-headed households, resulting in a slew of psychological issues.

**Okoli, T. O. (2021)**, During COVID-19 in rural Anambra State, Nigeria, the study focused on coping methods used by female-headed households to fight food insecurity. The study suggests that the government provide women with palliative care and that women diversify their diets.

### *2.1: Importance of the study*

The most woman headed households in the developed countries are women who are never married or divorced. The feminization of poverty, or the practice of expanding the focus of poverty among women living in headed homes, is a significant concept to characterize the social and economic conditions of women headed households. Women who are responsible for their family have a dual part to perform at work and at home.

Therefore the condition of women with diverse marital status under various leaderships is highly significant to be studied. Some researches have demonstrated that the situation of women in the household is poor. Poverty is responsible for hunger and food insecurity. Discrimination against gender and, for many, racial and ethnic discrimination makes women poorer. Homeowners in women are twice the risk of all households in India being poor. Rural poverty factors range from poor climate to poor infrastructure. Vulnerable groups are particularly likely to be disadvantaged, such as female headed households, children and races, ethnic, religious or national minorities. In light of this, this study work is extremely concentrated and significant to the present context, as well as socially and timely relevant one.

### **3. Method**

This descriptive explanatory study was carried out among woman headed households in Vellore Town of Vellore District in Tamil Nadu, India's leading state in 2021. The necessary data were gathered using published and unpublished materials, government reports, journals, and books relating to the research theme.

This method spotlighted the researcher's energetic involvement in the research procedures, as well as the deep forethought, difficulty, and facts of the observed evidence under study. Theoretical diffusion, which was collected during the field visit using the observatory method in the study region, was used to determine the number of drawings. Throughout the research investigation, the investigator tried to put their personal beliefs aside and chronicle all elements and observations as much as possible, avoiding entangling their presuppositions in data collection and analysis as much as feasible.

#### *3.1: Positive outcomes*

Households with women's leadership tolerate numerous confrontations which could be a huge risk. As a result, their physical condition can be improved by training and application to new and diverse occupations, as long as extra money is kept and used to improve their social position. Changes to the family have resulted in progress and societal transformation.

The Head of a Household, who is not always the eldest household member, is usually responsible for the complete or majority of household spending or has the authority to decide how to spend household profits. One of these shifts is how single parents and single heads are perceived. Because of divorce, separation, immigration, or widowhood, a woman leader refers to a woman who is in charge of the family unit. Over the last half-century, divorce, separation, marriage death, addiction, or husband's disability, increased life expectancy among women, and husbands' relocation, migration, or abandonment have all contributed to an increase in the number of women-headed households in India and other developing countries. There is a

variation in the rate of women-headed households in different countries, according to global statistics.

Through such problems as poverty, poor socioeconomic conditions and numerous household tasks, women cannot maintain themselves in their well-being. As a result, they are aware of increased hazards and worse living and happiness standards in households. They are also affected by stress, mental diseases, depression, alcoholism, and economic and educational hardship. As per the investigation, women-headed households are more prone to and aware of a variety of ailments, including low income, significant financial difficulties, psychological, neurological, and physical diseases, and loneliness.

### *3.2: An Evaluation of Households Led by Women*

Roughly 27 million households are headed by women in India, accounting for 11% of the total households. Lakshadweep is 43.7 percent and Kerala has the biggest number of female households with 23percent. The households consisted of approximately 49 lakh single-member women, with three-quarters of them living in rural areas. More than 20% of single-member female families are found in seven Indian states, including Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Gujarat.

Women lead more than 16% of households in Tamil Nadu, according to official data from the Registrar General and the Census Commissioner of India. Women lead 3.27 pounds of the state's total 24.88 pounds of families, which is higher than the 13.17 percent national average. Women lead 29 lakh households out of a total of 1,84 crore in Tamil Nadu. Rural households outnumber urban households by 16.65 lakh to 12.99 lakh, with women leading the way. Women are also in charge of approximately 8,600 households in the state, each of which houses 11 or more people. The fairer sex consists of 1.10 lakh families with 7-10 members and 14.33 lakh households with 3-6 members.

In different religious communities, Muslim women lead families more than women of other faiths. According to data on households, sex, and the size of the head of household, Muslim women account for over 8% of all households in the state, followed by Hindu women (15.82%) and Christian women (15.82%). (8.14 percent). In contrast to the pattern seen in female-headed households, where the number is higher in rural regions, there are 6.08 lakh female Muslim households in urban areas compared to 1.67 rural households. Of the 48,000 families with 11 or more people, more than 34,000 are Hindu, more than 10,000 are Muslim, and roughly 2,300 are Christian.

According to research, roughly 88.44 percent of the country's 1.84 crore households are Hindu, 6.14 percent are Christian, and 5.16 percent are Muslim. The survey included 80 female families with deceased husbands or wives. The conditions included being the family's head, having children, and being willing to engage in the study owing to the death of one's spouse. In the year 2021, this research was carried out in the Vellore district of Tamil Nadu, India, in the town of Vellore. There were 80.09 percent Hindus, 14.28 percent Muslims, 4.79 percent Christians, 0.02 percent Sikhs, 0.03 percent Buddhists, 0.51 percent Jains, 0.26 percent other religions, and 0.02 percent non-religious or religious preferences, according to the 2011 religiosity census.



The religious census count is as follows. More than 34,000 of the 48,000 families with 11 or more members are Hindu, more than 10,000 are Muslim, and approximately 2,300 are Christian. According to statistics, approximately 88.44 percent of the country's 1.84 crore households are Hindu, 6.14 percent are Christian, and 5.16 percent are Muslim. Eighty female families with deceased husbands or wives participated in the survey. Conditions include being the head of the family, having children, and being willing and able to participate in the research due to the death of a spouse.

The population of Vellore was 504 079, 247 002 of which are males and 257 077 of which are women, according to the 2011 census. Vellore has a sex ratio of 1,009 females, much over the nation average of 926, for every 1,000 males. There were 48,547 children under the age of six, with 24,692 men and 23,855 women. The literacy rate in Vellore is 87.09 percent, which is higher than the national urban average of 85 percent. Literacy rates in Vellore were 92.03 percent for men and 82.23 percent for women. Vellore had 379,849 literates, including 199,247 males and 180,602 females. The city had 112,486 households and 70,257 workers, including 297 farmers, 395 main farmers, 4,387 household workers, 59,281 other employees, 5,897 excluded, 59 disadvantaged, 74 marginal agriculture workers, 667 stigmatized, and 5,097 marginal. The household of women headed by the city of Vellore is 19, 12,262 and is 17 percent. Women are usually not regarded as housekeepers in Vellore, except if an adult husband lives in the household permanently. In the field of study, there is an overall trend that more and more women are the main source of their families' financial support. Male household proportion decreased by 0.5 percent in 2011 compared to 2001, while female household proportion increased by 0.6 percent during the same period. More than 60% of female-headed households were permanent; whereas the percentage in socially weaker groups was lower, at 48.71% and 35.09%, respectively, among female-headed households.

Approximately 20% of female households in a telling city of affairs in Tamil Nadu had to travel 500 metres in urban areas and one kilometre in rural areas for drinking water. While approximately 42 percent of female-headed households had latrines on the premises, approximately 47 percent of such households had bathrooms on the premises. Moreover, data shows that around 40 percent of women's households live within one-room facilities in the city of Vellore and about 38.5 percent of those surveyed use LPG for cooking. Roughly 60 percent of headquarters women have television as their asset, while the figure rises to 65.57 percent in the case of male headquarters. Car, Jeep and Van are only 3.5 percent of respondents. While 5.2 percent of men's households are asset-specific cars. The data shows also that approximately 1.07 percent of respondents have no property, such as radio, TV, telephone, bicycles, scooters or automobiles. But only 0.90 percent has no assets with respect to male households.

#### **4. The effect of the joint family's breakdown**

This same transformation into a rural household affects the status and role of the household members significantly. One effect is the declining authority of the Joint Family Patriarch. In a common family, the eldest male member of the family is traditionally responsible for authority. After the family divides into several units, new centres of authority emerge, with each nuclear unit's eldest male head.

The educated and individualistic young generations are also often challenged by authority. Young people exposed to modern ideas of freedom, individualism and traditional authority show resentment. Following the break-up in a joint family, women, who had no voice in family affairs before, also emerge with enormous responsibility as masters of nuclear homes. The oldest woman also tends to lose her authority in this transition process. Many young women also question the dominant mothers-in-law attitudes. In the same way, many of the traditional lawyers are also faced with an uncomfortable situation because of the disproportionate individualism among the lawyers. The breakdown of the common family system is a serious problem for the elderly, the widow, the widow and other family members. This is ensured by the common family system. They are left to themselves following the breakdown of this family system. The day care facilities for the elderly or the orphan's home are not available in the rural area. Their position is therefore very critical. A lot of widows, widows, kids and even old couples are becoming beggars. Many leave old people as the final resort of their social security and mental peace around pilgrimage centres.

#### *4.1: Problems and Challenges that Women-headed Families Encounter*

At this time, the concerns and difficulties are divided into four categories poverty and monetary uncertainty, societal restraint, political pessimism, and the evils of the next generation. In rural Tamil Nadu, societal conditions are linked to the degree to which respondent households are able to be reserved isolated; as a result, if a family has adequate cash, they would be able to obtain in respondents who lack male guardians, as a mark of elevated category. As a result, women's home headship is adversely related to affluence.

#### *4.2: Possessions are Scarce*

After their husbands died, the majority of the respondents reported that they sold all or part of their land that they had inherited from their husbands. Some respondents had given their land to their brothers or in-laws so that they could start farming.

#### *4.3: The Lack of Adequate Jobs and Income Opportunities*

The job and income-generating opportunities available to respondent households in the research locations are insufficient: Working in other people's houses, which is widely regarded as the most demeaning and poorly paid work, is common, as is earthwork provided by the government of India through various schemes such as the hundred days employment programme, etc. It appears to be one of the best ways of increasing income-earning opportunities, and non-agricultural labourers as well as leather industry daily wage earners are able to do so. The family heads are compelled by their gender functions in the same way that mothers are. Another point to consider is the importance of gaining cultural approval. Aside from restrictions on women's actions and limitations on what women can do as a result of their domestic role, there is the very real problem that the severely gendered division of labour means that there are a disproportionately small number of salaried positions for which respondents is employed. In some circumstances, if job is available, poor people are unlikely to have the requisite education, abilities, or readiness.



#### *4.4: Incapacity in Politics*

Women in general have no position in the village's political affiliations, and this is almost entirely unproven in the absence of gender equity of women's well-being. At various times, a high-quality proportion of our things have desired to be signified, and those with male relatives passionate to do so charged better than those who did not.

Despite the fact that women-headed households are expected to fulfill all of their male counterparts' societal and financial obligations, their social status remains insignificant and peripheral.

#### *4.5: Women's Association is Hampered by Socio-Cultural Barriers*

Despite the fact that the respondents attributed the majority of their issues to the absence of a male household head, they also identified a location where socio-cultural limitations and obstacles contribute unwaveringly to the complexity. This is primarily true for respondents in the focus group, i.e., those who are not as disadvantaged as SHGs target group respondents.

#### *4.6: Some New Developments*

The structure of family living in metropolitan India has been diversified in the setting of rapid technological revolution, economic development, and social change. Life is much more complicated today, both in rural and urban regions, than it was a few decades ago. Many couples are employed in metropolitan regions, as well as in rural areas. These working couples will have to rely on others for child care and other services. Working couples encounter numerous issues as a result of the joint family's structural breakdown.

Many rural guys leave their wives and children in their birth homes in search of work. The educated westernized metropolitan family may not necessarily welcome the rural migrants for a prolonged stay. Their presence frequently causes conflict among family members. Rural migrants, on the other hand, are generally accommodated among the lower strata of metropolitan life. They frequently become members of these families as well.

The 2011 Census indicated a significant trend in India's evolving family structure. Although nuclearization of the family has been the major occurrence, data suggests that the extent of joint living is also expanding, particularly in urban areas. According to experts, the increase in joint living is primarily due to rural people migrating to metropolitan regions and sharing similar shelter and hearth with other migrants from the same region. The ancient institutions of authority and value have been challenged as a result of structural upheaval. The legitimacy of the age-old hierarchic authority is being called into doubt by the growing individualism. The previous value system undergoes considerable transformations as well.

### **5. Limitations**

Women's refusal to participate was one of the most major challenges to the study's success, which was overcome by emphasizing the study's goals and importance, as well as the pledge not to expose personal information. Women also requested that the interviewer be a woman in some situations, which was subsequently fulfilled by a professional female researcher.

Because this study was conducted in a setting with a variety of social and cultural institutions and a small number of participants, it may be difficult to generalise the findings. This problem, on the other hand, cannot be deemed a significant flaw because it is so closely linked to qualitative research philosophy. By sticking to the key principles of qualitative research and how to present it, the researchers attempted to alleviate this shortcoming to an acceptable degree.

## **6. Summary and Conclusion**

Female-headed households face a number of personal, intra-family, and social challenges. Multidimensional programmes are required to improve the health and empowerment of women-headed families. In order to break the cycle of poverty and disability, they need more financial assistance.

This situation in most cases shows how the head of households' wives and the family of their husband and children face each other. The number of people who have been excited to take decisions requires compliance and builds dependent women. In this study, women's households addressed much household narrow-mindedness in children and lack of family control.

Internal, intra-family, and social restrictions confront women who are the heads of families, disrupting their personal and social lives and jeopardizing their health. By providing adequate education and supporting in the changing of gender stereotypes, it is feasible to improve the social status of female-headed households.

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