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Perceived Psychosocial Changes in Life of Women after Marriage: A Narrative Analysis

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Abstract

The present study explores the psychosocial changes as perceived by women in their lives after marriage. Using a narrative approach, 250 married women (average age 31years) were asked to narrate the changes they perceived after marriage, through an open ended interview. The narrative analysis revealed that there were six major areas in which women perceived a lot of positive as well as negative changes. Findings suggest that marriage was a turning point in women's life. A number of participants were enjoying happiness, autonomy, changes in thought process and life perspective after marriage. But many of them perceived marriage as a barrier in their goal achievement, freedom and happiness. Physical changes as well as frequent visits to hospital were common for most of the women. Marriage had a strong impact on their thought processes especially in area of fertility related decisions. In sum, marriage had brought some decisive psychosocial changes in life of women.

Keywords: Psychosocial Changes, Autonomy, Thought Process, Happiness, Positive and Negative Effect.

1. Introduction

Marriage is a social union or legal contract between people called spouses that establish rights and obligations between spouses, their children and their in-laws. Indian marriage is an institution which acknowledges men and women to family life. Edward Westermarck (1891) defined marriage as the "*more or less durable connection between male and female, lasting beyond the more act of propagation till after the birth of offspring*".

In Hinduism, marriage between two people is a sacred relationship that is not limited to this life alone. It extends across seven or more lives, during which the couples help each other progress spiritually. For a woman, marriage marks the end of her life as a maiden. She has to leave her parents home to begin a new life in her husband's house, amidst new people and new surroundings. Marriage, therefore, became a matter of anxiety and stress for many women till they became familiar with their new surrounding and people in their lives. Now days the early stage of marriage is 'make or break' situation in many of the cases.

In Indian culture arrange marriages are much popular. Generally most of the marriages are arranged with the consent of the bride and groom and the blessings of elders, caste, natal chart gotra, family background, financial status of the groom, appearance character of the bride and groom. The willingness of the parents is important consideration in arranged marriage. Arrange marriage has its own pros and cons. The boy and girl do not get to know their future spouses before marriage. In arrange marriages, it is not important to know your partner. Two unknown people get married without knowing and understanding each other. Girls have no idea about their husband's nature, attitude and behavior. They are totally unknown about their partner. It becomes a challenge for her to change her life according another person's need and necessity.

Marriage is being a significant event in one's life. It brings a lot of changes especially in women's life. It is more pronounced in the case of women in developing countries such as India where traditional concept of family, household and socially determined gender roles are more intense. When a bride joins her new household, she is expected to merge her identity with her husband's family. After marriage newly married women aspires to establish her own household according to her wishes. The household of her husband was nurtured by her mother-in-law over years. This becomes a challenge for her to disturb an establish pattern of a family.

Women perceive marriage in different ways. Some finds it pleasurable while for others it is a hindrance in her freedom. Freedom is the main attribute of recently married women suffered after marriage. This leads to a great deal of frustration among the married women. They always have a lack of freedom. A women is under her father's care during childhood, under the husband's supervision during youth and under her son's scrutiny during old age (Barrot, 1972).

Women's autonomy after marriage is essential area of transformation. Autonomy has been variously defined as "the ability to obtain information and to use it as the basis for making decision about one's private concerns and those of one's intimates" (Dyson & Moore 1983: 45); and "the degree of women's access to control over material resources(including food, income, land and other forms of wealth) and to social resources (including knowledge, power and prestige) within the family, in the community, and in the society at large"(Dixon 1978:6). Autonomy here means women have control over their own lives- the extent to which they have an equal voice with their husbands in matters affecting themselves and their families, control over material and other resources, access to knowledge and information, the authority to make independent decisions, freedom from constraints on physical mobility, and the ability to forge equitable power relationship within families.

Well-being is also most important psychological area of transition for a woman after marriage. The association between marital status and subjective well-being, the crisis or event explanation is most relevant to discussion of adaptation. Life satisfaction is one aspects of psychological well-being. Lucas et al.(2003) documented differential rates of change in life satisfaction in the years following marriage. There are substantial individual differences in rate of change in life satisfaction, some people declined rapidly after marriage, other returned to baseline after a number of years and other continued to increase overtime.

Married women practicing new rituals and customs related to married women like Karva chauth etc. Many of these pertain to the restrictions and regulations imposed on them due to their status of being married now. In Indian setting, the women are expected to remain happy at home with their in-laws family which is regarded as to their primary responsibility.

Most of the married women accept major changes in their perceptions, and thinking. It's all about their individuality but almost all women feel a lot of changes in their life which affect their psychological, social and physical well-being.

Researches on marriage in developing countries are less and narrow due to conceptual boundaries and data limitation. Especially in India few researches has been conducted concerning the conversions in life of women after marriage. This study is trying to find out the psychosocial changes perceived by married women.

2. Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to identify the major changes perceived by a woman after marriage.

3. Method

Sample: The sample consisted of 250 women aged 20 to 45 years. Out of them 145 belongs to villages of Gorakhpur division and 105 were from city area of Gorakhpur. The 73 rural women were literate and 72 were illiterate. The average years of marriage was-15years. Among the 105 urban women 75 were literate and 30 were illiterate.

Material: An open ended interview was conducted with the following question in focus-

- 1) What changes do you perceived in your life after marriage?

Procedure: The main purpose of this work was to find out the perceived psychosocial changes in lives of women after marriage. In order to fulfill the objective of the study, the researcher had made cordial atmosphere and explained the purpose of the research. The interview has been taken with women who had given consent for the same. The data was collected individually and it took around 20-25 minutes with each of the participants. After completion of data collection the responses were analyzed with content analysis method.

4. Results

In response to the question, what changes do you perceive in your life after marriage, a total of six major themes have been emerged. These six major themes are- changes in life perspective, changes in thought process, physical changes, responsibility, autonomy, and happiness.

4.1 Changes in Life Perspective

An important area of change which came up very strongly from interviews was changes in life perspective. It is a broader area which consist some other sub themes as follows-

a) Managed Life - Most of the participants reported that they have become more managed in their life and work style after marriage. *For example-“Shadi ke phle apni man marji chalti thi,man kiya to kaam kiya nahi to chhod diya ki baad me krenge , par shadi ke baad sab badal gaya,life bhut hi salikedar ho gaye.sabhi kaam samay se poora karna padta hai aura b dheere-2 samay par hi kaam karne ki aadat pad gayi hai.”* Before marriage the women work on their own will but after marriage they have to work and live as per rules of the in-laws family and they have to be punctual and complete the assigned work in time.

b) New Life Begun - For some participants, marriage was an event of beginning new life. They felt that they have started a new journey of life, e.g.-*“Shadi hone ke baad sab kuch badal gaya. Naya ghar, naye loag, nayi living style. Aisa lag raha hai jaise naye jeevan ki suruaat ho gayi ho.Ab nayi-nayi responsibilities hai aur unko poora karna mera farz hi.”*

c) Life Became Adorable - After being married a lot of women started to love their life. Their narrations suggested that for them life has become something to enjoy and love, e.g.-An literate women having passed 7 years of her marriage uttered that-*“Mere liye to shadi ke baad jo sabse bada change aaya wo ye tha ki mai apne jeevan se pyar karne lagi. Mujhe shadi ke baad wo sabhi khushi mili jo har ek ladki chahti hai. shadi se pahle maine jeevan me itni khushi kabhi nhi mehsoos ki.”*

d) Life is like Curse - According to some illiterate rural women, life seems to them a curse. Like some of their other counterpart women they were not enjoying their marriage. One of them said that-*“Shadi ke baad mera to jeevan hi narak ho gaya hai.Pati sharab peeta hai.Usko kisi bhi jimmedari ka koi ehसाas nhi hi. shadi ke baad maine apne jeevan me koi sukh hi nhi dekha.”*

e) Goal of Life - Many of the literate respondents aspire to achieve their life goals.. But after marriage they were unable to pursue their ambition. Marriage and the responsibilities associated with marriage has become a major hindrance to obtain their goals. A number of literate women were dissatisfied with their lives with reference to their career. An urban woman aggressively mentioned that -*“Maine padhai isliye ki thi ki apne pairo par khadi ho saku. Par shadi ho jane ke baad jeevan ke is udadesya ko poora nhi kar payi.pati ne kaha ki jab mai kama rha hoo to tumhe kya jaroorat hi.ghar sambhalo.”* Another women told that-*“Mai jeevan me bahut kuch karna chahti thi.samajik karyo ko karne me meri ruchi thi par shadi ke baad kuch aise paristhitiya samne aaye ki mai ye sapna poora nhi kar payi.”*

4.2 Change in Thought Process

The narrations of many women revealed that they felt changes in their way of thinking. Women accepted that their conceptions and misconceptions, prejudices, stereotypes, beliefs about life events had been changed a lot and these changes were particularly influenced by the way of life of their respective families of in-laws. e.g. - *“Shadi ke pahle mai bahut bindas thi, kisi ko kuch bhi bol diya, jo man me aaya wahi kiya. par shadi ke baad ye baat samajh me aayi ki ye baat kitni gambhir ho sakti hi. Bina soche samajhe kaam karne ka kya parinam ho sakta ha. Ab to kuch kahne ya karne se pahle sau baar sochna padta hai.”*

An illiterate women accepted that – *“Kisi ko buchha nhi ho rha hai ye baat kitni gambhir hai ye shadi ke pahle nhi samajh me aata tha par jab apni shadi hue tab ye baat samajh me aayi ki buchha to seedhe aurat ki khushi, ijjat, maan- samman se juda hota hai. agar buchha nahi hai to sabhi ijjat nhi karte.”*

4.3 Change in Bodily Appearance and Health

After marriage the pressure of conceiving child leads to changes in body appearance and frequent visits to hospitals. Therefore, women perceived a lot of changes related to their health, body shape and figure and are dissatisfied with their body appearance. e.g. - *“shadi ke baad mai bahut moti ho gayi hu. Maine bahut kosis ki par pahle jaisa figure nahi pa saki.”*

A women having some fertility related problem told- *“phle mujhe kabhi-kabhi fever aata tha tabhi doctor ke paas jati thi par shadi ke baad doctors ke chakkar laga-laga kar thak gayi hu. Shayad kuch auchha ho jaye.”*

4.4 Responsibility and Accountability

Most of the women perceived additional household duties and overall responsibilities. They found themselves more attentive towards their duties for others especially for in-laws and husband. e.g. *“Shadi ke baad ghar ke kaam –kaaj ki jimmedariyan to badh hi gayi. Ghar me kuch aucha ya bura hone par bhi hme hi jawab dena hota hai. Sasural me kisi ko koi dukh na pahuche, sabki pasand –napasand ka dhyan bhi rakhna padta hai.”* Other women reported that- *“Jab mai unmarried thi to mere upar koi economical responsibility nhi thi par shadi ke baad to financial skill bhi sikhna pada. Paise to pati hi kamate hi par unhe kharcna kaise hi ye mai decide karti hu.”*

4.5 Autonomy

Autonomy was an important area of change perceived by many women after marriage. Some participants felt marriage had added freedom while others found decreased freedom.

a) Increased Freedom - The feeling of liberty and the sense that one is able to take their own decision was a major change reported by women. For many participants, marriage was the gateway of enjoying their autonomy. They were sharing a close relationship with their husband's. They have freedom of choices e.g.- *“ Mere mayke me loag khule vicharo wale nhi the. Hum apne decision khud nhi lete the. Papa jo kahte the wahi karna padta tha. Par shadi ke baad pati bahut supportive mile. Unki wajah se mai apne aap ko swatantra mehsoos karne lagi.”* Some participants felt freedom in having their own house, and other life luxuries e.g.- *“ Shadi ke pahle bhai- bahno ke sath sabhi cheeje share karni padti thi par ab sab kuch apna hai to bahut khushi hoti hai aur jaise chaho waise har cheej use kar sakte hai.”*

b) Decreased Freedom - Many of the participants revealed that after marriage their freedom has been curtailed. They have to sacrifice their freedom as per the will of husband and in-laws, change their lifestyle and adjustment according to them. Women told that before marriage they were free to enjoy their life with friends and to make their own decisions regarding to their career and interest. But now they were dependent on their husband and in-laws., e.g.- *“ Shadi se pahle mai jab bhi chahti thi apne friends se milne ja sakti thi, ghoomne ja sakti thi par ab aisa nhi hai. Ab to har decision pati se pooch kar lena padta hai . Yaha tak ki jyada phone bhi nhi attend kar sakti hu.*

Another woman said that, - *“ Mai job karu ya na karu ye mera faisla hona chahiye par sasural me to sas-sasur chahenge tabhi job kar sakti hu. Pati chahe to bhi kuch nahi kar sakte hai.”*

4.6 Happiness

A lot of women experienced marriage as a pleasant event of life. Analysis suggests that for them, happiness is also something external which can be derived out of caring by people or appreciation of their work by someone significant. Important sub themes are-

a) Husband a good friend and cause of pleasure- According to most of the respondents their life partner was a good friend for them. Women told that their husbands understand their feelings and emotions. e.g.- *“ Jeevan*

sathi ke roop me mujhe bhut hi auchha dost mil gaya hai jo mere upar poora bharosa krta hai aur mujhe support bhi karta hai.”

One woman said that “ *Mere pati to meri khusiyon ka karan hai.wo mujhe bahut mante hai aur mujhe khush rakhne ki hamesha kosis karte hai.”*

b) Increased travelling- Many women reported that after they had been travelling a lot with their husbands and this again is increasing pleasure and happiness in life as travelling breaks the monotony and routines of daily life. e. g.- “ *Shadi ke pahle mai yahi Gorakhpur me hi rahti thi par shadi ke baad bhut travelling ki.mere pati ko ghoomne ka shauk hai aur unhone mujhe bhut si jagah dikhai hai.abhi kuch dino pahle hum Shimla gaye the.*

These narrations had suggested that the life after marriage was not the same as before marriage for almost all the participants.

5. Discussion

Marriage brought many changes in different aspects of life of both men and women. Marriage provides basic insurance against adverse life events and allows gains from economies of scale and specialization within the family (Becker 1981). However, this study was only concentrated on the perceived psychosocial changes in lives of women. The findings of the study revealed that there were a lot of changes in different aspects of life of women after marriage. Even life perspective was also affected by marriage. After marriage for many of the respondents the lives become more joyful than before marriage. Marriage is a turning point in life of women. They followed a managed life routine. It was the beginning of new life for women.

Happiness is a part of subjective well-being. It derives from internal satisfaction and external appreciation. After marriage, a woman gets satisfaction and caring. Husband's care brings happiness in her life. Marital quality also is positively associated with personal well-being (Sternberg & Hojjat, 1997). Argyle (1987) found in a study that married women reported more happiness than those who are not. Happy married life increases well being of a woman. The link between subjective well-being and being married holds for people of all age and educational level. Analysis of data showed increased happiness in women. A woman starts new life with lots of positivity and hope. Spouse love and support brings happiness in their life. They become satisfied with their life and partner. According to Self-Extension theory (Aron & Aron, 1996), relationship satisfaction is a natural byproduct of self expensive lane. Being in a loving relationship makes people feel good. They then associate these positive feelings with the relationship.

An illiterate woman told that her life is like a curse after marriage. For her, marriage was a negative experience. She felt more stress and depression. William et al. (1991) reported that multiple role juggling had immediate negative effect on task enjoyment and mood along with the complex nature of psychological adjustment to multiple role occupancy. So a possible reason for her negative emotions could be multiple role juggling. Her husband's behavior and attitude are playing negative role for her negative emotions.

Findings suggest that thought process was an important area of change. Most of the participants accepted that marriage has changed the views about a lot of things especially in case of infertility. They perceived that their conceptions, beliefs and prejudices had been changed a lot. They came to know that consequences of infertility including psychological sufferings. It affects individual's health and well being. The ability to have children is perceived to be a women's most unique and important role as well as her obligation to society (Izubara, 2000). Women who does not fulfill these expectations face social difficulties, potentially including divorce or dowry threats directed towards the wife's natal household (Unisa 1999,Patel 1994). Thus women perceived a major change in their conception of having child after marriage.

Change in physical appearance and health related issue was found as a major area of change. Most of the women complained about weight gain and frequent health check-ups related to infertility. Recent evidences suggest that self report of health is related to change in life satisfaction. If they perceive satisfaction in life it belongs to good health, But less satisfaction from life have harmful influence on health.(Easterline, 2003; Nation Opinion Research Center, 1999, p. 172).

After marriage woman found herself much more responsible and accountable compared before. From the very beginning they were told that they have to go their in-laws. These sayings developed a sense of responsibility. After marriage they used to perform their household things and their duties towards other properly. They found themselves responsible for every action related to their family. Brickman et al (1982) have reported that people may hold themselves responsible for both the cause and solution. That is why a woman after marriage performs their duties well because they think that only they are the cause and solution of life events related to in-laws.

Study showed that women felt major change in their autonomy. A number of literate and illiterate participants accepted that after marriage their freedom is bounded. When they were unmarried, they were free whatever they want to do. They could go anywhere, enjoy with their friend. But after marriage these type of freedom were restricted. In Indian families, there is a typical pattern of male dominance and female dependence visible. The husband enjoys the superior position over the wife. Major decision making role is mostly the prerogative of the husband. Kapur (1974) found in a study that the wife accepts a subservient position in the family. Her role in domestic sphere remains insignificant. Being married a woman enters in a new family and took a lot of responsibilities. Muzamil and Akhtar (2008) reported that woman generally possessed low decision making power. They depend on their husband or family members for decision making. Finding also suggests that goal of life was a major area which was affected by marriage. Due to lack of freedom recently married women suffered and that is why they were unable to get their aim of life. In this study most of the women were 18 to 22 at the time of their marriage. Age at marriage may also be related to women's autonomy through another channel, because younger brides are more likely to be docile, in areas where parents-in-law seek to limit women's power in the household, they may have a preference for younger brides. Early marriages increase life satisfaction in women. Easterline (2003) also documented increase life satisfaction among those who married in the first decade of adulthood.

In contrast analysis indicates increased freedom in women. Many literate women told that they were enjoying their own autonomy after getting married. Being married, women have her own house, households and other possessions. It increases a feeling of authority and responsibility and if husband supports her in her autonomy it brings confidence in life. Gupta and Yesudian (2002) found that high household autonomy and high freedom are important determinants for women empowerment. Autonomy makes woman decision maker and powerful. A woman's autonomy may be manifest through her control of major resources, such as having her name on a housing title or rental agreement, as well as through control of minor resources such as having cash on hand for household expenditures. A number of studies also suggested that the ability to make decision regarding a variety of household choices is an important part of women's empowerment (Bloom, Wypij and DasGupta 2001; Jejeebhoy and Sntnar 2001; Kishore 2000; Morgan et al.2002). There was not much difference between the changes perceived by rural and urban women after marriage. The women of both settings were felt lot of positive changes, while few of them pick out some negative.

6. Conclusion

From the present study, it can be concluded that marriage is an important happenings of every women's life. Most of the women have positive feeling towards it. But after marriage every individual feels different changes in their lives. Life perspective, Thought process, Autonomy, Happiness, Physical change and responsibility are the major fields of change after marriage. These changes were positive as well as negative also. Majorly these changes depend on the spouse or life partner they have met. If they are supportive, caring and loving then life of a woman becomes easier, but if not, situation would be vice-versa. For almost all the participant either they were rural or urban, marriage has increased their responsibilities toward family and new relations. There is a wide range of benefits from marriage for all rural and urban women.

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