Understanding the personality of single and married women: Implications for women-centred social work practice

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: In contemporary Indian society, there is now restructuring and reorientation of a women's role. The importance of studying married and single women has now become more pertinent because of the changing attitudes, increased literacy rate of women, and their involvement in politics and economic development. The present study aimed to understand whether the status of being "married" or "single" influences a woman's personality.

METHODS: The sample consisted of 52 women from New Delhi, India. The NEO-FFI-3 (McCrae & Costa, 2010) was used to measure the five domains of personality: neuroticism (N); extraversion (E); openness to experience (O); agreeableness (A); and conscientiousness (C).

FINDINGS: The analysis showed no significant differences in personality between single and married women.

CONCLUSION: It was concluded that the status of being married or single was, alone, not enough to differentiate their personalities. However, married women have varying moods and the capability for communicating and interacting with others more effortlessly in comparison to single women. This paves way for the demystification of the notion of marriage and provides avenues for deconstructing the position of marriage as a norm. Social workers should be aware of gender inequalities and bias, including about status of married and single women.

KEYWORDS: Women; single women; married women; personality; NEO-FFI-3; women-centred social work

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Marriage is a destiny conventionally offered to women by society. In Indian society, marriage is a holy institution, one which must happen for a woman at a definite time as dictated by society. It is often seen as the sole justification for a woman's existence. Radical feminists perceive this as an imposition mainly owing to two things: the purpose is seen as reproduction for progeny and maternity; and secondly, the gratification of man's sexual needs alongside taking care of his family (Nuti, 2016). Clarke et al. (2010) also highlight the need and care perspective as another function of marital therapy. Whilst, for a woman, marriage is the only means of integration into the community, and if they remain unmarried, they are socially viewed as waste (Beauvoir et al., 2011). Kareem (2013) suggests that, in Indian society, marriage is seen as a norm that excludes and labels women as "outcasts" for their non-compliance.

Marriage is often used as a tool for women to be treated differently and deprived of their rights but also reminded of their duties. Idealisation and adherence to norms was an understood aspect of the marriage (Clarke et al., 2010). The gender disparity originating from popular socio-cultural beliefs also led to differential treatments and practices which are visible in today's society (Dahal et al., 2015). Traditionally, the status and the role of women in Indian society have been considered inferior to that of men, only married women were seen as complete beings. If a woman has not been married after passing a particular age, she is subjected to questions by her relatives and is looked down upon (Beauvoir et al., 2011). Remaining single is a choice that women can make in today's society and it is becoming a popular and accepted practice. Salve (2015) captures the sharp rise in the cases of single women in India claimed by Census of India 2011 which states that there is an increase of 39% in single women in India, the numbers rising from 51.2 million in 2001 to 71.4 million in 2011, according to census data. This could be viewed in the light of the resentment against the determinants stated in the above section. In this regard, Salve (2015) directly captures the issues of single women as well as married women through the narratives of both cohorts. The National Forum for Single Women's Rights (hereafter NFSWR) lists the context of prejudice and patriarchy to highlight the reasons for increased single-women-headed families over a period of time.

The shift

Over the past few decades, there have been changes in laws, attitudes and norms affecting women's status, roles, and development in Indian society. As a result of these changes, married women have ventured ahead of the traditional role of wife or mother, and have sought employment and careers outside their homes. These practices are reflected in the economic and social development of the nation (Liddle & Joshi, 1989). Rapid social changes in married and single women's careers and family roles are accompanied by a significant transition in their attitudes towards career and family. Researchers have highlighted that the complex relationships between a woman's objective roles and her subjective attitudes regarding these roles, affect her overall life satisfaction and sense of identity in society (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997).

The context of single women

Matlin (2011) said that single women are more likely than married women to work outside their homes. Most single women decide to marry later or not to marry at all because they are career-oriented. These women often report that being single allows them flexible working hours and geographical mobility. In contrast, a married woman may find it difficult to handle work and her family life. According to Klemer (1954), differences between a group of single and a group of married women might be found in six general areas: personality; family life background; circumstances; interest; behaviour; and physical attractiveness. The significance of studying married and single women in contemporary times is more relevant than ever because of the shifting attitudes of society towards the same. Central among them is the changing value system with an increase in women's literacy, participation of women in politics, economy and popular movements. The study explores how/if the status of being married or single influences a woman's personality.

Review of literature

Research studies on the themes of "single women", "married women", "marriage", "family living", "personality development", "career development", "gender roles", "life satisfaction", and "psychology of women" were reviewed using Boolean logic. Gilbert (2010) claimed that married women are less triumphant, more depressed, less healthy and more prone to die a brutal death than single women. Marriage is a good deal

for men, but not so good for women. Men benefit physically and psychologically from marriage. She called this the "Marriage Benefit Imbalance". This term was first introduced by Bernard (1982). She argued that women were not valued for parenting and domestic responsibilities like men who work outside the home and that married men were happier and lived longer than single men while married women were less happy and lived shorter lives than single women.

A married woman has no time left for her hobbies or interests as her family depends on her. This is one of the main reasons why a married woman is seen as a liability at the workplace. But being single has its disadvantages. The availability of a willing sexual partner is a problem for single women. And the financial costs tend to be greater for those who live alone than those who share a household (Smith, 2013). Single women are also short of the emotional support that makes difficult decisions easy to accept (Bowerman, n.d.).

Married and single women differ in aspects of independence, money, free time and future (Bowerman, n.d.). A married woman can no longer live as an independent entity as her actions have to be considered from her partner's point of view whereas a single woman has to consider only her own interests in making decisions. Also, single women can spend their earnings as per their wishes without worrying about an annoyed partner. Being married is like a second job for a working woman as she also has to work at it for it to be successful. They also have to plan and raise the family. In contrast, single women seldom worry beyond their monthly expenses (DePaulo, 2019).

The Indian studies, on the contrary, focused on social, economic and political aspects of single and married women (Chacko, 2003; Nanda, 1992; Raj et al., 2010). There are also ample references for domestic violence and especially the research conducted during and since Covid-19 have captured the plight of the marital status of women during lockdown highlighting structural violence and intimate partner violence (hereafter IPV). The factors concerning singlehood and psycho-social factors are not delineated in many studies.

Method

The study aimed to understand whether the status of being married or single influences a woman's personality. The study was descriptive in nature and was conducted with a sample of 52 participants, i.e., 26 single and 26 married women from New Delhi, India. In the study *married women* refers to those women who were married at least for five years, and *single women* refers to those women who had never married. Employed women belonging to the age group 32-42 years and who were married or single were included. Ethics approval was obtained from the Institutional Research Conduct and Ethics Committee (RCEC), CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru. The identified participants were provided with an information sheet to tell them about the study, and informed consent was taken in writing. A socio-demographic questionnaire was used to collect the socio-demographic characteristics and NEO-FFI-3 (McCrae & Costa 2010), Form S, a 60-item version of the NEO-PI-3, was used to measure the five domains of personality: neuroticism (N); extraversion (E); openness to experience (O); agreeableness (A); and conscientiousness (C) in single and married women.

According to the *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, neuroticism is characterised by a chronic level of emotional instability and proneness to psychological distress. Extraversion is characterised by an orientation of one's interests and energies toward the outer world of people and things rather than the inner world of subjective experience. Openness to experience refers to the individual differences in the tendency to be open to new aesthetic, cultural, or intellectual experiences. Agreeableness refers

to the propensity to act cooperatively and unselfishly. And conscientiousness refers to the tendency to be organised, responsible, and hardworking (*APA Dictionary of Psychology*, n.d.).

The NEO inventories are a standard measure of the five-factor model, which is believed to be the scientifically proven approach for conceptualising the differences between individuals. Each of these five domains is independent and distinctive from the others, and it helped to obtain a quick understanding of the basic attitudinal, emotional, experiential, interpersonal and motivational personality styles of these women.

Table 1 shows some of the domain-specific items in NEO-FFI-3 (McCrae & Costa, 2010) for the five domains.

Participants were asked to respond to the items by marking any one of the five response options: *strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree* and *strongly agree*. The participants' responses were scored to get the domain scores for N, E, O, A and C and means were calculated for the five domains. The t for independent samples was then calculated for each domain to ascertain domain differences between single and married women. The t_{cal} and t_{crit} were drawn graphically. The t_{cal} obtained were tested for their significance using a two-tailed test, at 0.01 and 0.05 levels of significance.

Results

Table 2 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants. In the current study, the total sample consisted of 52 participants (26 single and 26 married).

Table 1. Domain-specific Items in NEO-FFI-3

Domain	Items
Neuroticism	1. I am not a worrier. 6. At times I have felt bitter and resentful. 16. I rarely feel lonely or blue. 26. Sometimes I feel completely worthless. 56. At times I have been so ashamed I just wanted to hide.
Extraversion	2. I like to have a lot of people around me. 7. I laugh easily. 12. I prefer jobs that let me work alone without being bothered by other people. 17. I really enjoy talking to people. 32. I often feel as if I'm bursting with energy.
Openness to Experience	8. I think it's interesting to learn and develop new hobbies. 13. I am intrigued by the patterns I find in art and nature. 23. Poetry has little or no effect on me. 28. I would have difficulty just letting my mind wander without control or guidance. 53. I have a lot of intellectual curiosity.
Agreeableness	19. If someone starts a fight, I'm ready to fight back. 34. I tend to assume the best about people. 39. Some people think of me as cold and calculating. 49. I generally try to be thoughtful and considerate. 54. If I don't like people, I let them know it.
Conscientiousness	5. I keep my belongings neat and clean. 20. I try to perform all the tasks assigned to me conscientiously. 45. Sometimes I'm not as dependable or reliable as I should be. 50. I am a productive person who always gets the job done. 60. I strive for excellence in everything I do.

Source: McCrae & Costa (2010).

Of these, 29 (55.76%) belonged to the age group 32-37 years, and 33 (44.23%) belonged to the age group 38-42 years.

The means were obtained for each domain for single and married women. The t for independent samples was then calculated for each domain to ascertain domain differences between single and married women. Table 3 shows the t_{cal} and t_{crit} that were drawn graphically. Also, the t_{cal} obtained was tested for their significance using a two-tailed test, at 0.01 and 0.05 levels of significance.

Discussion

Neuroticism

The most ubiquitous domain of personality scales contrasts emotional stability with neuroticism. The common tendency to experience negative effects such as fear, melancholy, embarrassment, rage, regret, and aversion is the foundation of the neuroticism domain. Women high in neuroticism are prone to have irrational thoughts, to be unable to manage their impulses and to have poor coping strategies for stress than others. But women who score low on neuroticism are seen to be emotionally stable. They are generally composed, even-tempered, at ease, and they know how to face stressful situations without becoming disturbed. Aggression, anxiousness, depression, lack of sympathy, recklessness, self-consciousness and susceptibility are the facets of neuroticism.

According to Srivastava et al. (2003), diverse theories suggest different predictions about how the mean levels of different personality traits alter in adulthood. The five-factor theory proposes the plaster hypothesis: The different personality traits stop altering by the age of 30. It was found that neuroticism declined among women but did not vary among men.

The mean obtained for this domain for single and married women were 26.808 and 27.346, respectively. The obtained t value was -0.305 at t_{crit} 0.05 (±2.009) and 0.01 (±2.678). Since the t_{cal} was not significant, it was concluded that both married and single women are not significantly different for neuroticism. But the means show that some differences do exist, which could be due to a variety of factors. Married women have obtained higher means than single women. It seems that married women are more likely to experience anxiousness, aggression, jealousy, guilt and depression. They might react inadequately to stressors and take everyday situations as intimidating. They may also experience feelings of shyness or self-consciousness. Therefore, significant results could have been obtained if the facet scores were also determined and analysed.

Extraversion

Extraverts are sociable, but sociability is only one of the traits that encompass the domain of extraversion. Extraverts like people, prefer large gatherings and groups and are also confident, full of life and talkative. They desire excitement and inspiration and have a propensity to be cheerful. They are bubbly, active and hopeful. This domain of personality is strongly correlated with interest in innovative occupations. In this respect, introversion should be understood as the lack of extraversion rather than to

Table 2. Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Age group (years)	Single women frequency (%)	Married women frequency (%)	Total frequency (%)
32-37	18 (69.23)	11 (42.30)	29 (55.76)
38-42	8 (30.76)	15 (57.69)	23 (44.23)
Total Frequency (%)	26 (100)	26 (100)	52 (100)

Table 3. Means, t_{cal}, t_{crit} and Values of df for Each Domain for the Participants

Domains	Means		t_{cal}	t_{crit}		Significance
	Single women	Married women		$\alpha = 0.05$	$A = 0.01$	
N	26.808	27.346	-0.305	±2.009	±2.678	Not significant
E	25.308	28.231	-1.917	±2.009	±2.678	Not significant
O	29.231	28.115	0.691	±2.009	±2.678	Not significant
A	28.115	28.923	-0.486	±2.009	±2.678	Not significant
C	30.462	30.5	-0.017	±2.009	±2.678	Not significant

be its opposite. Hence, introverts are aloof rather than unfriendly, independent rather than followers and even-paced rather than lethargic. Introverts prefer to be alone. This does not necessarily mean that they experience social anxiety. Even if they are not high-spirited extraverts, introverts are not depressing or gloomy. The facets of extraversion are warmth, gregariousness, assertiveness, activity, excitement-seeking and positive emotions.

According to Hosseinkhanzadeh and Taher (2013), extraversion, openness and conscientiousness had a significant negative correlation with life contentment, but agreement had a significant positive correlation with life contentment. The findings suggested that personality traits can explain 19% of the variation in life contentment. It was also found that the relations between income and education had no significant effect on life contentment. Life contentment is influenced by the relation between different factors, and one of them is personality traits.

The mean obtained for this domain, for single and married women were 25.308 and 28.231, respectively. The obtained t values were -1.917 at t_{crit} 0.05 (±2.009) and 0.01 (±2.678). Since the t_{cal} was not significant, it was concluded that both married and single women are not significantly different for extraversion. But the means show that some differences exist between the two groups. Married women have obtained higher means than single women on extraversion. It seems

that married women are more enthusiastic, talkative, assertive, and gregarious. They have a propensity to enjoy interactions with humans and enjoy social gatherings. They tend to be energised when around people. But there have been instances where both groups gave the same responses to some of the questionnaire items. For example, participants S9, S10, M9 and M10, disagreed on the item "I don't get much pleasure from chatting with people." Therefore, there exists a contradiction, which could have been understood with the facet scores of this domain.

Openness to experience

Openness is a significant dimension of personality but is less well known than neuroticism and extraversion. The different elements of openness, namely, active imagination, sense of aesthetics, emotional awareness, preference for variety, intellectual inquisitiveness and independence of making decisions have frequently played a part in different theories and measures of personality. However, their coherence into a single broad domain is not familiar. Open individuals are curious about their inner and outer worlds and are prosperous experientially when compared to closed individuals. They experience both positive and negative emotions more enthusiastically and consider novel ideas and values than do closed individuals. People scoring low on openness are predisposed to be conventional in behaviour and outlook. They prefer familiarity to newness, and their

emotional responses are a bit muted. The facets of openness are daydreams, aesthetics, thoughts, actions, ideas and morals.

The study conducted by Costa et al. (2001) reported that women are seen to be higher in neuroticism, affection, agreeableness, and openness to feelings, whereas men were seen to be higher in boldness and openness to ideas.

The means obtained on this domain for single and married women were 29.231 and 28.115 respectively. The obtained t value was 0.691 at t_{crit} 0.05 (±2.009) and 0.01 (±2.678). The obtained *t* value was not significant. Therefore, it was concluded that both single and married women are not significantly different for openness. But means show that differences do exist between the groups. Single women have received higher means than married women. It can be understood that married women were more closed to new experiences. They tend to be conventional and traditional in their outlook and behaviour and have a narrow range of interests. But single women are more likely to have more liberal views and do not support biased, authoritarian or ethnocentric opinions.

Agreeableness

Agreeableness is mainly an aspect of interpersonal tendencies. An agreeable person will be fundamentally altruistic. Such an individual is sympathetic and willing to help others and believes that others will also be equally helpful. In contrast, low scores on agreeableness or disagreeable and antagonistic people are narcissistic, doubtful of others' intentions and competitive. It is enticing to see the agreeable side of this domain as both socially preferable and psychologically better, and it is unquestionably the case that agreeable people are more admired than hostile individuals. The facets of agreeableness are trust, straightforwardness, altruism, compliance, modesty and tender mindedness.

The means obtained on this domain for single and married women were 28.115 and 28.923 respectively. The obtained t value was -0.486 at t_{crit} 0.05 (±2.009) and 0.01 (±2.678). The obtained *t* value was not significant, so it was concluded that both single and married women were not significantly different for agreeableness. But means obtained show a slight difference between the groups. Single women have 28.923 as the mean value. Married women may be more kind, sympathetic, cooperative, warm and considerate when compared to single women. Single women can be characterised by scepticism about the motives of others and they could be more likely to be scheming and competitive in their social relationships.

Conscientiousness

Differences in individuals in the process of preparation, organisation and execution of tasks are the base of conscientiousness. Conscientious individuals are focused, iron-willed and determined. Some individuals with high levels of conscientiousness become great musicians or athletes. On the optimistic side, high levels of conscientiousness are linked with scholastic and occupational success and on the pessimistic side, it may lead to annoying meticulousness, compulsive tidiness, or workaholic behaviour. The facets are competency, orderliness, dutifulness, achievement motivation, self-discipline, and thoughtfulness.

The means obtained on this domain for single and married women were 30.462 and 30.5 respectively. The t value obtained was -0.017 at t critical 0.05 (±2.009) and 0.01 (±2.678). Since the t_{cal} was not significant, it was concluded that both single and married women are not significantly different for conscientiousness. But the means obtained shows that there is a slight difference between the groups. Married women have obtained higher means for this domain. Married women may be more efficient, organised, self-disciplined, dutiful and aim for achievement. They may be more organised, dependable, hard-working, and reliable

than single women. But since the difference is very small, nothing could be clearly said. Significant results could have been obtained with the facet scales for this domain.

Affective and interpersonal plane

It may be useful to consider pairs of domains or factor scores in terms of two-dimensional planes, which correspond, in many cases to particular areas of life. Two of these combinations have been extensively researched: the affective plane, defined by N and E, which represents the individuals' basic emotional styles and the interpersonal plane or circumplex, defined by E and A. E and O together are essential both for vocational interests and for selecting therapy.

The N + E mean for single and married women were 52.116 and 55.577, respectively. Married women are higher on the affective plane. They may have mood variability and vary between the extremes of positive and negative affect.

The E + A mean for single and married women were 53.423 and 57.154, respectively. Therefore, it is seen that married women are also higher on the interpersonal plane. It implies that they can communicate and interact with others easily. They also make use of persuasion, active listening, and leadership.

Limitations

There could be various possible explanations for the non-significant results. The sample size was minimal, which makes it difficult to generalise the findings to the wider population. With small samples, violations of assumptions are difficult to detect, even if they are present. Since the shorter form of NEO-PI-3 was used, the differences did not seem to emerge. The test may have also been susceptible to social desirability.

Many factors, which include genetics, parenting, environment, and societal variables, influence an individual's personality. Gender roles and the status of being married or single

are only a set of potential factors that shape a women's personality.

Future directions for research

Even though this study produced meaningful and insightful results, it was limited. Further researching this topic by considering all the limitations discussed earlier, could significantly enhance our understanding of differences that exist between single and married women, which have remained invisible but perhaps are real and need to be tapped differently.

Implications for women-centred social work practice

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) defines Social Work as a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing (included in the global definition of social work) (International Federation of Social Workers, n.d.).

Social workers work with people of all ages and genders and deal with different kinds of issues. But when working with either men or women, social workers need to be aware of the factors that influence gender-specific vulnerabilities. A women-centred social work practice requires them to be sensitive to the factors that intensify women's vulnerability. Social workers must critically study and understand women's status in society, to develop well-thought-out interventions for women and also for developing women's agency and citizenship.

Simavi is a non-governmental organisation that works for the social and economic empowerment of women and girls in Africa

and Asia. They employ a women-centred approach that aims to engage women and girls at all stages of their programmes, i.e., from designing the programme to evaluating its impact (Simavi, n.d.). The Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai, India established a Centre for Women-centred Social Work in 2015, which focuses on enhancing interventions and work on women's issues. It also offers an MA Social Work in Women-Centred Practice which aims at preparing and equipping students with the necessary knowledge, attitude, practice and skills to work with women in different settings (TISS, n.d.).

A plethora of research is being conducted by social workers to study the issues of women extensively. Researchers focusing on the personality of single and married women and understanding how it influences their condition, status, role, resources and power in society can help in developing effective interventions for individual and interpersonal development, personality development and also behaviour modification for use in the diverse settings where social workers practise.

Human resource development and management

Leadership and Personality Development at Workplace

In the 21st century, both single and married women have started to come out of the confines of their homes, to live a better life, professionally and personally. Understanding the personality of oneself and others can help the women employees to make informed decisions in light of each individual's preferences, avoid conflicting situations, appreciate the diversity, find the right career path and improve upon one's decision-making abilities. This also helps them to appreciate their strengths and recognise their weaknesses, as well as those around them. The findings of personality studies can help workplaces to identify the areas for professional growth and to organise employee development programmes focusing

on leadership development and personality development. Such employee development programmes can empower women employees and make them great leaders.

The World Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) is a grassroots-driven worldwide movement rooted in the leadership of women, young women and girls. The YWCA's goal for 2035 states that "100 million young women and girls will transform power structures to create justice, gender equality and a world without violence and war; leading a sustainable YWCA movement, inclusive of all women" (YMCA, n.d.). One of the ways by which they aim to achieve this goal is by investing in and building young women's leadership.

Studying women's personalities is crucial as it contributes to one's leadership style. Kaiser and Hogan (2011) proposed that personality has an impact on the effectiveness of a leader. Even Hassan et al. (2016) stated that an individual's personality has an impact on one's leadership style, therefore, it should be considered while examining the effectiveness of the leadership. Özbağ (2016), in his research, found that out of the five personality factors, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness were found to be important antecedents for leadership.

Clinical and community practice

Individual and family counselling

Studying the personality traits of single and married women allows social workers to help women to understand themselves better, for instance, how they will think, feel and act in situations and their attitudes, motivations, strengths, weaknesses. They can also help them to identify the potential threats or problems they can have at home, or in their interpersonal relationships. Social workers can assist these women to develop the necessary skills to manage or address such problems and this will allow them to lead fulfilling lives.

Social workers can help women to develop their personality, eliminate maladaptive behaviour and adjust better in their social relationships through using casework and group work in family welfare, women and child welfare settings, marriage counselling centres, medical and psychiatric settings, correctional facilities and in residential institutions for women. Yorba-Perez (2014) argued that social workers should understand the preferences, lifestyles and behaviour of single women to provide essential microservices concerning family planning and women's health, birth control, pregnancy testing, HIV/AIDS testing, and screening for sexually transmitted diseases, etc.

Correctional social work

An individual's personality influences his or her behaviour, including criminal behaviour. Some of the earlier studies to study the relationship between personality and criminal behaviour were conducted by Hans Eysenck. At the core of his theory of criminal behaviour is the role played by the three personality traits, namely, psychoticism, neuroticism and extroversion-introversion. Eysenck and Eysenck (1973) in their study found that female prisoners are characterised by high scores for psychoticism, neuroticism and extroversion.

Mili et al. (2015) studied the increase in crimes committed by women between 2001 and 2011 which grew from 5.4% to 6.2%. They observed that the nature and brutality of crimes by women had undergone extreme changes. Earlier, only a few women were involved in monstrous crimes, but now they are being arrested for more complicated crimes.

In a correctional facility, a social worker's clients are individuals who have been, are, or may be imprisoned. Social workers can work with such women to change their criminal behaviour patterns, which implies understanding and developing their personalities. This will help women to successfully rehabilitate into society (Roy, 2017).

Social work with vulnerable sectors

Women are sometimes among the vulnerable sector of Indian society. The Constitution of India has granted equal status to women but they may still be considered vulnerable because of deep-rooted customs. Social workers who act as facilitators, advocates and counsellors play an important role in helping women defeat barriers to necessary social change. They can assist women to be catalysts of change by empowering them with the necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills to self-direct and self-govern their lives.

The National Commission for Women (NCW) was established by the Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India, with the vision to support women outside and inside their homes by empowering them to access rights and entitlements with equal opportunities to contribute to society. The NCW has cells focusing on policy monitoring and research, psychiatric/custodial homes reform, capacity building and women welfare among others. Research focusing on understanding the personality of women can contribute the findings for use by these special cells of NCW to develop the interventions required for the welfare, safety, skill development and empowerment of women.

Social welfare and development administration

The social directive of the social work profession is to ensure the wellbeing of all people, irrespective of the societies they belong to, i.e., urban, rural or tribal. To achieve this, social workers engage in community work, administration of social services, advocacy, policy formulation and research. The 11th Five Year Plan of India had emphasised the need to focus on single women, particularly those who chose to stay single. However, not much progress was made. But the 12th Five Year Plan addressed some of the issues affecting single women, like property rights, housing benefits, employment opportunities, and provided special privileges (Dhar, 2016).

Ministries and constitutional bodies at the state and central level are also concerned about social welfare and development. The Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India, introduced the SWADHAR scheme, which caters to the needs of women in difficult circumstances. The objectives of this scheme are met through strategies like vocational and upskill gradation training, counselling, and behavioural training. A Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) was also established by the Government of India under the Ministry of Women & Child Development for the general welfare of families, women and children. Garcia-Sedeño et al. (2009) through their study concluded that there is an association between personality and vocational interests. A study of the personality of single and married women could help social workers to develop tailored intervention programmes focusing on behaviour modification, personality and leadership development, skill development and much more.

Geriatric social work

In a study conducted by Maldonato et al. (2017), extraversion, openness to experience and conscientiousness were found to be associated with good cognitive health in old age. They concluded that individuals with high neuroticism and agreeableness scores would benefit from customised cognitive interventions to prevent age-related decline in cognition. Wilson et al. (2004) examined the relationship between personality and mortality in older individuals. They observed that the risk of death was double for those who are high on neuroticism and half for those who are high on conscientiousness. Friedman (2000) also supported this by stating that conscientiousness predicts longevity.

Geriatric social workers are responsible for caring for the elderly in diverse settings like hospitals, old age homes, daycare centres and clinics. They support the psychological, emotional, behavioural and social challenges of the elderly through counselling and therapy and by acting as mediators between the elderly and their caregivers. An assessment of the personality of the elderly is important to provide personalised care (Meuwissen-van Pol et al., 2019).

Conclusion

Marriage is an important social institution in Indian society. It is considered essential especially for women to live a meaningful life. A woman's dignity and respect used to depend only upon her marital status. But over the past few decades, there have been incredible changes in laws, attitudes and norms affecting women's status, roles, and development in Indian society. As a result of these changes, women today choose to stay single or marry and married women have ventured beyond their traditional roles for employment outside their homes. The present study aimed to understand whether the status of being married or single influenced a woman's personality. While significant differences did not exist between single and married women, the latter may have mood variability and the ability to communicate and interact with others easily, in comparison to single women.

Many factors determine a women's decision to be 'married' or 'single'. Social changes, economic empowerment and higher education, among others, are crucial factors in this decision making. In this regard, a social work practitioner, especially an ubuntu practitioner requires collectivisation which asserts the need for harmony and social justice for co-existence. At the advent of increasing global concerns about gender-based violence and gender justice, ubuntu practitioners need to be gender inclusive at both micro-level of practice and at the policy level to bring attitudinal change concerning gender equality.

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