UNDERSTANDING VOLUNTARY SINGLEHOOD FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF VOLUNTARILY UNMARRRIED PEOPLE

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Abstract

The primary objective of the study is to explore subjective well-being of voluntarily unmarried individuals and to investigate the challenges and coping strategies employed. The qualitative data was collected from sixteen voluntary unmarried individuals using the semi-structured interviews. The purpose of the interview was to gain the perspectives on the decision to remain unmarried, choice between independence, personal space and social responsibilities, and the coping strategies used to minimize the emotional and social difficulties such as loneliness and social isolation. The qualitative data was analyzed using thematic content analysis. Various aspects of life of people who are single by choice such as, reasons of being unmarried family support, views on marriage, advantage and disadvantages of being married, discriminations and stereotypes faced by unmarried people. It can be derived from the findings that propagation of the belief that being unmarried as problem need to be minimized and it can be treated as a conscious and acceptable choice.

Keywords: Subjective well-being, voluntarily unmarried, Society, Singlehood, Social acceptance.

What is Marriage?

Edward Westermarck in his "History of Human Marriage" defines marriage as "the more or less durable connection between male and female lasting beyond the mere act of propagation till after the birth of offspring. (Gupta, 2015). According to the dictionary, marriage is the legally or formally recognized union of two people as partners in a personal relationship. It is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs, and attitudes that prescribe the rights and duties of the partners and accords status to their offspring (if any) (Oxford dictionary, 2008). According to Arthashastra, marriage is the manifestation of the virtue of Kama (pleasure) according to the principles of Dharma (cosmic law underlying right behavior and social order).

The universality of marriage within different societies and cultures is attributed to the many basic social and personal functions for which it provides structure, such as sexual gratification and regulation, division of labour between the sexes, economic production and consumption and satisfaction of personal needs for affection, status, and companionship. Perhaps its

strongest function concerns procreation, the care of children and theireducation and socialization and regulation of lines of descent. Through the ages, marriages have taken a great number offorms.

In the biological evolutionary scale, the more complex the species, the longer the offspring is dependent on its mother for survival from the time of birth to maturity. Human beings, at the top of the evolutionary scale, require the most time of all species to reach maturity. This imposes increased duties on human parents for the care of their children, and marriage traditionally has been seen as the institution best suited to fulfill these parental duties and responsibilities.

Traditional Idea of Marriage

In the western world, Marriage was essential for day-to-day survival, for reproduction and social acceptance. People fell in love, of course, but that wasn't what marriage was about. Today, we marry for love. But this early version of soul-mate marriage was based on the idea that men and women should adhere to radically different gender stereotypes in order to inspire love. The assertive breadwinner married the nurturing homemaker. In the 1960s, people became fed up with this stifling of their individuality and staged a full-on revolt against the constricting social roles. Freedom of expression and individual authenticity became the Holy Grail. By the 21st century the nature of marriage in Western countries— particularly with regard to the significance of procreation and the ease of divorce—had begun to change. In 2000 the Netherlands became the first country to legalizesame-sex marriage; thelaw went into force on April 1, 2001. In the ensuing years, numerous other countries followed suit.(Britannica, 2019)

Himawan, Bambling and Edirippulige (2017) conducted a study Modernization and Singlehood in Indonesia: Psychological and social Impact. The single lifestyle has become prevalent in Indonesia, whose society strongly upholds the universality of marriage. The societal view of marriage is favorable despite the growth of individualism and the erosion of many conservative values as a result of modernization and globalization.

Being single past the social normed marriage age is perceived as deviant in Indonesia. Yet the number of singles delaying marriage or choosing not to marry is increasing and following international trends. People in this category are often defined negatively and may be subjected to derogation. This review examines the relationship between modernizations, including online technology, and explores various coping strategies in managing social stigma.Themethodofthisnarrativereviewusedasetofcriteriatoidentifyrelevant   contemporary studies mainly published over the last 15 years and discusses the findings and implications of

the literature. The findings revealed that the impacts of modernization are inevitable and are changing younger people's values and expectations of marriage leading to a delay in marriage or choosing not to marry. This occurs despite the persistence of conservative social values that maintain a strong pressure toward marriage. Singles opt to develop a number of strategies for managing the tension between traditional social values and their choices to delay marriage, including: opposing marriage ideology, using humor, gaining social support, and attaching to religious values and rituals.

Singlehood

Singlehood is often defined as the state of being unmarried. However, since it is common for people to be in a romantic partnership yet not married, this term also applies to the condition of having no romantic partner at all. Singlehood is perceived as being alone which holds a different but adjacent meaning. The present exploratory research focuses on singlehood understood as voluntary (i.e., a result of an individual's choice) and not involuntary (i.e., as related to external factors, thus not experienced by choice). Therefore, in this research the nature of voluntary singlehood is related to the subjective perception of singlehood by an individual in terms of his or her own choice.

Studies and researches have provided a lot of insights on why single people choose to remain single. Sometimes, it's their own defenses; most people have been hurt in interpersonal relationships. With time and painful experiences, they all risk building up varying degrees of bitterness and become defended. This process begins long before they start dating, in childhood when hurtful interactions and dynamics lead them to put up walls or perceive the world through a filter that can negatively impact them as adults. These adaptations can cause people to become increasingly self-protective and closed off. In adult relationships, they may resist being too vulnerable or write people off too easily. (Firestone, 2008)

Another reason might be fear of intimacy, some people consciously or unconsciously fall into toxic behavior patterns or some may simply avoid any kind of commitment due to their own inhibitions. Low self-esteem has also been quite a common reason for people wanting to remain single. They believe they want a fulfilling relationship more than anything, but they believe even more firmly that no one worthwhile would be interested in them. People possess "critical inner voices" that tell us we are too fat, too ugly, too old or too different. When they listen to these "voices," they engage in behaviors that push other people away. When people choose to remain single, it might not be for the reasons that they're telling themselves. Their lack of confidence affects their situation and vice versa. Other

reason, especially for women, may be prioritizing their job or education. In traditional Indian society, women are usually expected to move in with the husband's family and take up the domestic responsibilities. Many – a – times women are expected to stop working after they're married. With the movement towards achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women, women are now choosing independence in all aspects of their lives over clutches of domestic life.

Bharti (2011) did a study named as 'Causes for Remaining Single: A Comparative Study' which focused on - (1) to study the reasons why women remain single (2) to study the effect of surrounding on the adaptation process of single women. For this purpose the sample of 160 single women (80 from each state i.e. Delhi and Jammu so as to know how change in lifestyle of single women affects the reasons for remaining single. All participants were single, and snowball sampling technique was used for selecting sample and women. The sample used in this study was in the age group of 30 - 39 years and few were of 60 years and above age group. The education level of participants were divided under the categories namely - functional literacy, matriculate, graduation and doctorate. Results indicated that the classification done according to the education level of participant's shows a large number of respondents were literate and only 2 were functionally literate. Religion wise distribution revealed that large number of participants was Hindus, and then Sikhs, Christians and very small proportion were of Muslims. The reasons why women choose to remain single were analyzed, which revealed that there were mainly two causes for remaining single - Voluntary Decision and Circumstantial Factors.

Girme, Overall, Faingataa and Sibley (2015) did a study named 'Happily Single: The Link between Relationship Status and Well-Being Depends on Avoidance and Approach Social Goals'. However, early researches had established that single people experience poorer wellbeing in comparison to those involved in romantic relationships, relationships can also be root cause of rejection and conflict that single people can avoid. This study explored whether the connections between relationship status, daily life satisfaction (Study 1, N = 187, undergraduate sample) and life satisfaction and personal wellbeing over a period of time (Study 2, N = 4,515, nationally representative sample) were diminished by social goals. In these two studies, a test was conducted to test whether the effect of relationship status (i.e., single versus involved in a romantic relationship) on life satisfaction and wellbeing is based on people's social goals to manage and maintain social relationships by (1) avoiding negative relationship experiences like conflict and disagreements (avoidance social goals) or (2) enhancing intimacy and relationship growth (approach social goals). The results from both

the studies depicted that being single was not prevalent. Single people who were high in avoidance goals, strived to prevent relationship conflict and disagreements were more or less happy and satisfied in comparison to people involved in a relationship (Studies 1 and 2). Whereas, individuals who scored high in approach goals, strived to enhance relationship closeness were likely to be more satisfied with life, especially when they were involved in a relationship.

The single life is not for everyone, but neither is marriage. The few happily unmarried Indians illustrate, at the very least, that it's possible to lead a fulfilling, supported life as a single person. Research suggests they may be the rule, not the exception. An American study on Singledom from 2009 found 'always-single' (never-married) participants above 40 to be doing "just fine." The same study found that a 'can-do' attitude towards life was what determined a person's sense of fulfillment, not whether they were married or single. The 'always-single' group was even less likely to experience negative emotions with this 'can-do' attitude than the married group. (DePaulo, 2009)

The primary aim of this research is to establish linkage between the marital status and mental health. To find out the subjective well-being of voluntarily unmarried people is the main purpose of the research. Therefore, the primary aim of this paper is to provide a deeper insight into singlehood from the perspective of its voluntary nature

Objectives of the Study

- To understand the increasing trend of voluntary unmarried people in India
- To understand the affecting factors to the choice to remain unmarried
- To study the challenges are faced by unmarried people.
- To study how unmarried individuals manage their responsibilities
- To understand the lifestyle of unmarried individuals

METHODOLOGY

Sample of the Study

For this purpose, 16 voluntary unmarried participants were selected of the age group of 30 years and to 62 for the research; moreover, the sample was collected through snowball sampling technique.

Tools

For the purpose of the study, semi - structured interview schedule was developed by the researchers. Total 62 statements were constructed in the first draft. Then with the group discussion and feedback from the supervisor and experts, the final draft was developed with total 26 statements, which were categorized into four different aspects such as, Perspectives

on Family, Social Life, Professional Aspects and Personal Aspects.

FINDINGS

Thematic Content Analysis is used for the qualitative analysis of responses of participants.

Family Views
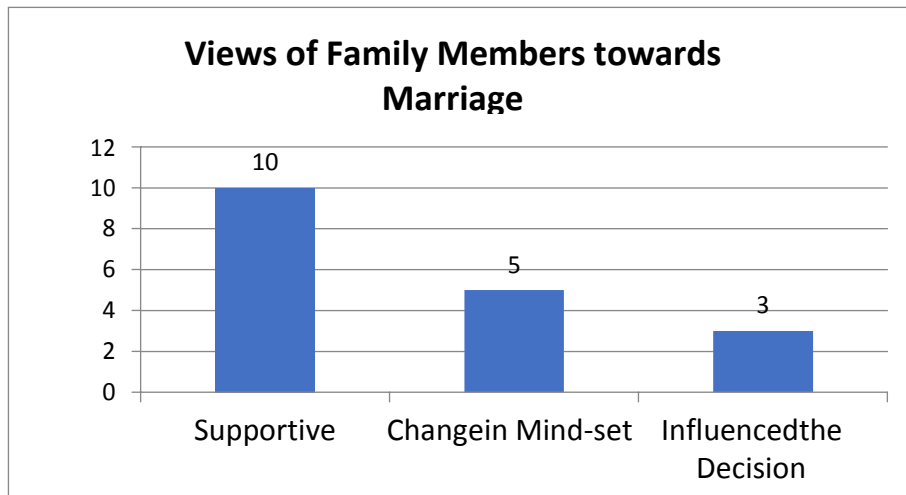

**Views of Family Members towards Marriage**

Figure 3.1 - Viewpoints of Family Members on the idea of Marriage and the preference of being unmarried.

Figure 3.1 shows the viewpoints of family members on the idea of marriage and the preference of being unmarried. The participants were asked about the views of their family members for the idea of marriage. The responses were distributed into mainly 3 categories – Supportive, Change In Mindset and Influenced the Decision. 10 responses showed supportive side of family members, 5 responses were about family changed their mindset, and 3 responses showed how family members influenced the decision of getting married. The viewpoints of family members did not influenced few participants, whereas some changed their mindset over a period of time and understood the decision of remaining unmarried; however some faced insistence from family to get married and take career as a priority.

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Social Life Aspects
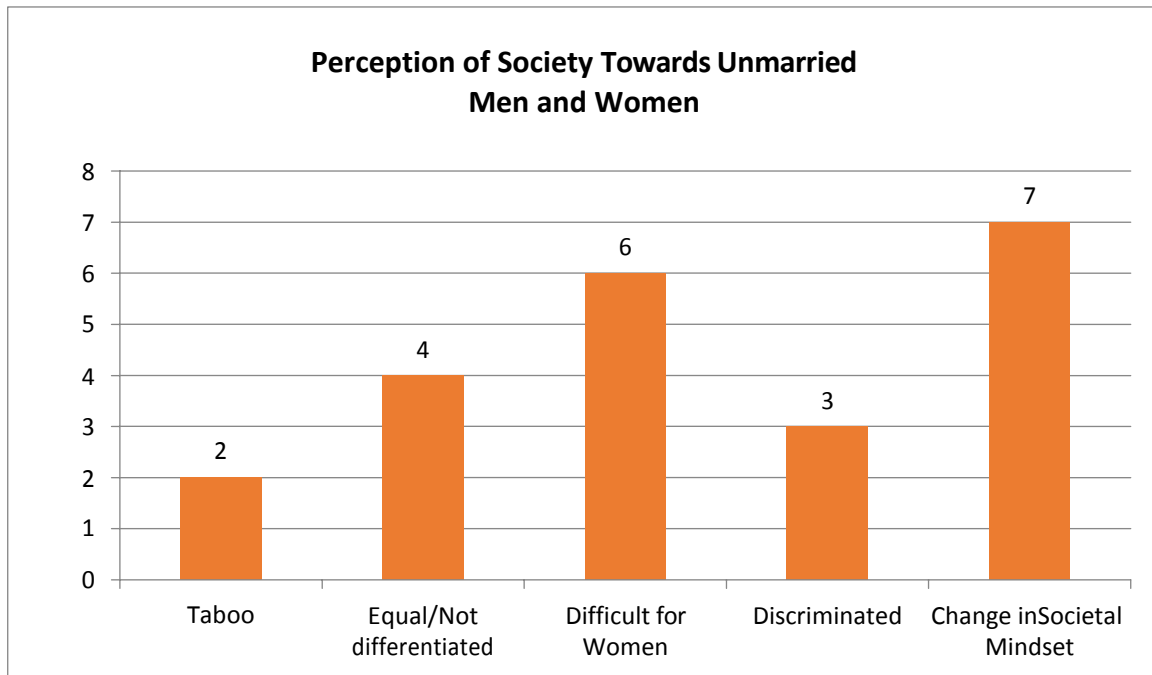
Figure 3.2 - The perception of the Society towards unmarried Men and Women

Figure 3.2 shows the perception of society towards unmarried men and women. The participants were asked how society perceives voluntarily unmarried men and women, 6 responses stated it difficult for women to stay unmarried, 7 responses talked about change in societal mindset and thinking but according to 2 responses it's still a taboo and 3 responses stated unmarried people face discrimination but 4 responses stated not differentiated all are treated same.

Table 3.1 - Differences in the perception of unmarried individuals in India and Abroad

INDIA	ABROAD
1. Many a times, people are forced into an arranged marriage as a part of a social Structure.	1. People have freedom to choose their partners or if they want to be married in The first place.
2. Due to marrying forcibly, a lot of Conflicts emerge and this results into not being able to cope.	2. The quality of the relationship is focused Upon. Marriage is seen as only a social construct.
3. Responsibility toward family is more.	3. Focus is more upon the self and one's Welfare.

The table 3.1 depicts the differences in the perception of unmarried individuals in India and abroad. In India, people are forced into arranged marriage as a part of social construct which they do just for the sake of their family, as they consider it as their responsibility. Moreover, getting married forcibly leads to conflicts which are unable to cope. Whereas in Abroad, people have freedom to choose whether they want to get marry or not, the focus is on the quality of relationship and on one's self welfare.
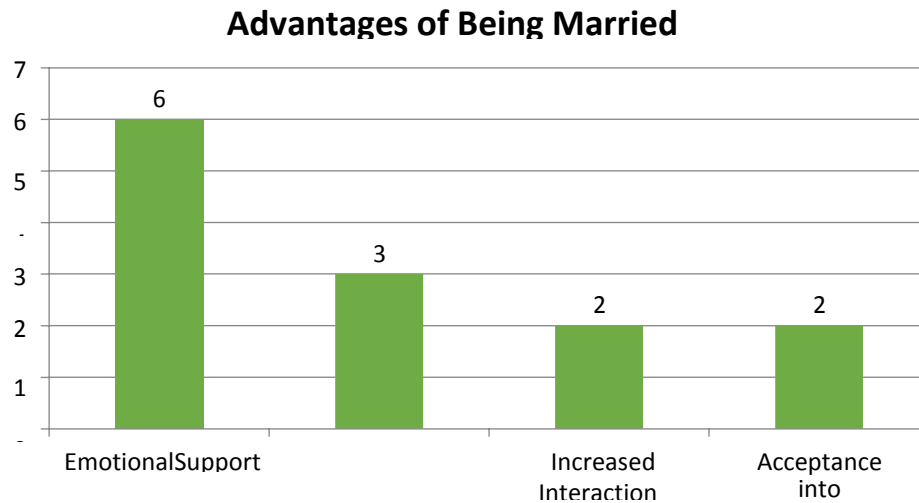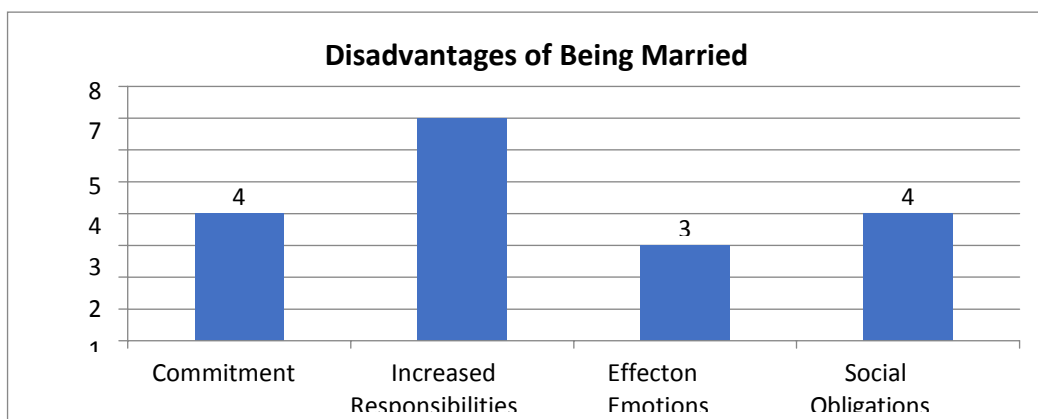
Advantages of Being Married

Figure 3.3 shows the advantages of being married. The participants were asked about the advantages of being married; all responses were categorized into, emotional support, financial support, increased interactions and acceptance in society. 6 responses mentioned emotional support as an advantage whereas 3 responses mentioned financial support. 2

Disadvantages of Being Married

responses were about increased interaction and 2 were about societal acceptance.

Figure 3.4 - Disadvantages of being married

Figure 3.4 shows the disadvantages of being married. The participants were asked about the disadvantages of marriage, out of all the responses, maximum responses were about increased responsibility that is 7, 4 responses were about commitment as disadvantage, 4 responses mentioned social obligations in marriage and 3 responses talked about the effects on emotions in marriage.

Pressures, Discriminations, Stereotypes faced by Unmarried People

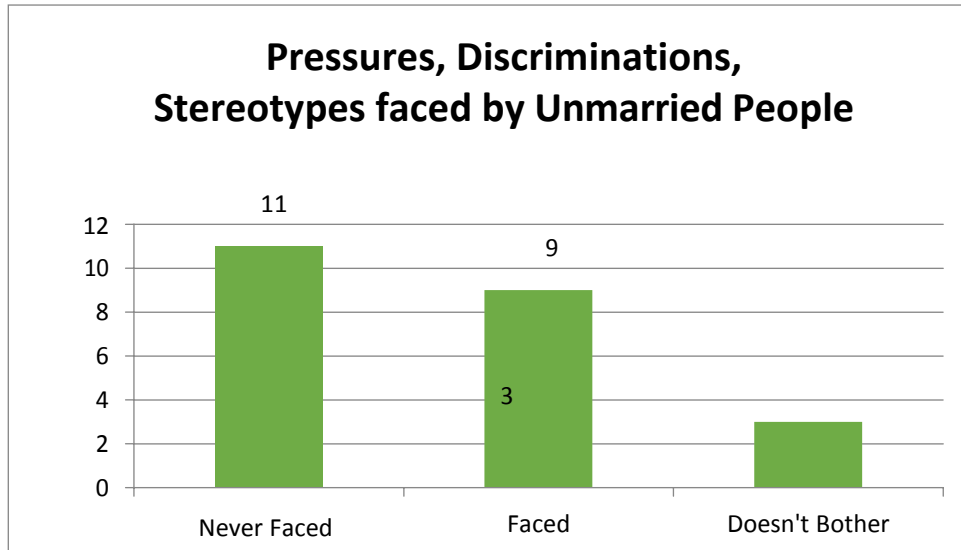| Category	Value
Never Faced	11
Faced	9
Doesn't Bother	3

Figure 3.5 shows the pressures, discriminations, stereotypes faced by unmarried individuals. The participants were asked if they ever face discrimination or were pressured for marriage, 11 responses were of never faced any problem, 9 were about faced problems and 2 responses mentions that it doesn't bothers them. The responses about facing problems also involved the coping mechanisms used by participants such as avoiding and neglecting such situations.

Reasons of being Unmarried

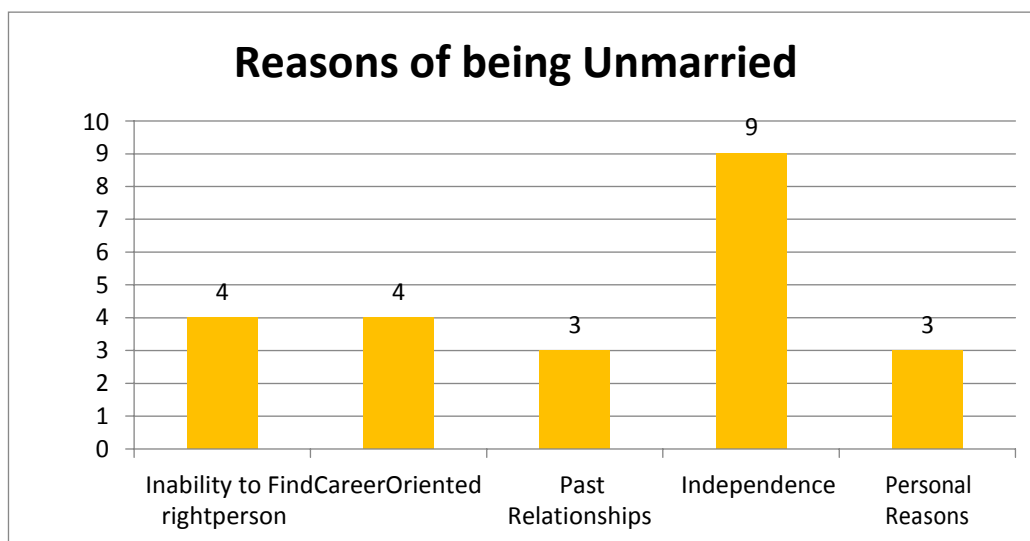| Category	Value
Inability to Find right person	4
Career Oriented	4
Past Relationships	3
Independence	9
Personal Reasons	3

Figure 3.6 depicts the reasons of being unmarried. The participants were asked about the reasons of remaining unmarried, the responses were broadly classified into 5 categories – inability to find right person, career oriented, past relationship, independence and personal reasons. 4 responses were about inability to find right person, 4 responses were about career oriented. 3 responses were about past relationships. 9 responses were about independence, and 3 responses were about personal reasons. There were many reasons behind the decision to be unmarried, some depicted the inability to share personal space with someone else, and don't want to take responsibilities of others, or wanted to live alone. Others were about the personal opinions like the effect of western culture and cultural difference and few were about taking responsibility of family

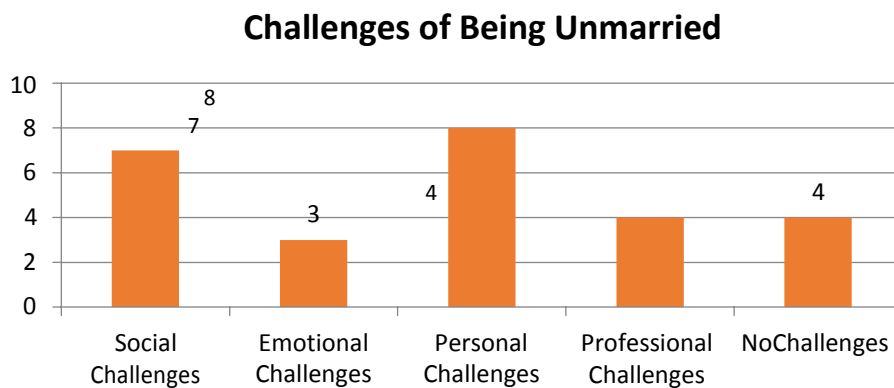**Challenges of Being Unmarried**

Figure 3.7 shows the challenges of being unmarried. The participants were asked about types of challenges faced by them. 7 responses were about social challenges,3 responses talked about emotional challenges, personal challenge were reported in 8 responses, professional challenges were seen in 4 responses, and 4 responses were of never faced any challenges. Social challenges included aspects of remaining unmarried, getting isolated in social gatherings, society providing less support, comments and made up stories. Emotional challenges involved not being able to share emotions and emotional security. Moreover, personal challenges referred about no one to take care of, providing guidance, financial security, physical safety, plus no help in household chores, and other related chores. Professional challenges described about being burdened with work, challenging to take leave, and have to finish others work.

DISCUSSION

The present exploratory study focuses on the subjective well-being of voluntarily unmarried people in the Indian context. Subjective well-being is defined as the good or satisfactory

condition of existence, a state characterized by health, happiness, prosperity and welfare. To understand the factors that affect the decision of individuals to remain unmarried, challenges faced by them and to identify and analyze their coping strategies, semi-structured interviews were conducted. A number of open-ended questions were asked, covering four major dimensions – *Personal Aspects, Social Life Aspects, Professional Aspects and Family Views*.

Family Views - The influence of family members on the decision of remaining unmarried was assessed by inquiring about the views of the individual's family. The views of the family regarding the decision of an individual to remain unmarried have showed both supportive and unsupportive side of family members; also, a change in perspective from being unsupportive to being supportive was found. It was also seen that concern by the family members were seen as invasive to one's privacy and freedom. Influence of family to pursue their career also influenced their decision to remain unmarried.

Social life aspects include perception of the society on unmarried individuals, effect on social life, influence of social media, advantages and disadvantages of marriage, missing aspects of life, difference in perception of unmarried individuals in India and abroad, pressures and discriminations faced by unmarried individuals. The participants responses about *Perception of the society on unmarried individuals* depicted that the unmarried people face discrimination, stereotypes and are considered to be unusual, women face more difficulty and have to restrain themselves from interacting with spouses of other women, there is a change seen in the societal mind set and is still evolving but according to some respondents it is still a taboo and some state that there is no difference and everyone is treated the same regardless of their marital status. Responses on the *Difference in perception of unmarried individuals in India and Abroad* indicate that in India- people are forced into arranged marriages which is done just for the sake of their family as it is considered as a social construct and involves certain norms of religion, caste and other, arranged marriages lead to increase in conflicts due less similarity in thoughts, unmarried people are overburdened with work and are considered to have less responsibility and some say that there are more responsibilities on an individual due to the family structure whereas in Abroad- people have freedom to choose to get married or not, the focus is on the quality of relationship and on one's self welfare.

Participant's responses about *Advantages of being married* depicted that men have a patriarchal advantage in a marriage, there is a sense of emotional support, financial support, social security, increased societal acceptance and society considers idea of marriage as a social structure. The responses given by participants on *Disadvantages of marriage* which derived an increase in responsibility which includes responsibility of the partner and their

extended family, commitment to the partner and sacrifice of self-interests and independence, increase of economic, social and psychosocial burdens, face disputes and conflicts on small issues. The perspective of participants on *Missing aspects of life* depict that some individuals do miss out on certain aspects of life which includes companionship, security, family aspects, physical need and some reflect not missing any aspects as there is a decrease in social interaction in their life. Responses on effect of social life reflects that some show no effect as they are socially active and have a good circle of friends and family members to interact and some do face challenges in which the major challenge is social isolation and hindrance, they do feel outcast in social gatherings which is tackled by not attending them.

Reasons of Being Unmarried are divided into various aspects- inability to find right person, being career oriented, past relationships, independence and personal reasons. Inability to find the right person and being unable to devote time to socialize and seek a partner leads to singlehood; even after having the desire. Role of education and being committed to one's own work leads to being preoccupied with the same and hence, remaining unmarried. The influences of past relationships were assessed by inquiring about the experiences of the participant in their lives. This influence can be of two types. One can either be influenced by one's own past relationships or by broken marriages of others; or both. In the case of a few participants, it was seen that undesired consequences of a marriage of a third party and conflicted relationship between family members and oneself, perceived by the participant led to their present decision.

Conclusion

Due to globalization and modernization in the world and its influence on the present Indian culture, family systems are becoming nuclear. Migration, both immigration and emigration, has led to the family sizes becoming smaller. A trend to focus on one's own well-being first and then, to focus on having a partner has been witnessed. Marriage is being considered more as a social construct than as an obligation. More and more number of both, males and females are choosing work and professional life over marriage and hence, prefer being unmarried. In the present study, the well-being is understood from the perspective of voluntarily unmarried people. The responses were qualitatively analyzed in respect to marriage as an institution, preference to remain unmarried, the challenges faced at personal and professional levels and the coping mechanisms employed to overcome these challenges. It can be concluded that marriage is understood as a social construct, commitment and responsibility, a source of companionship and a part of culture and tradition. The well-being of voluntarily unmarried individuals can be nurtured and strengthened by overcoming the

taboos and stigma related to the choice of remaining unmarried; especially for women and increasing their social involvement. The major concern that has emerged in the study is that being unmarried is a choice and not a problem. Also, it can be concluded that various coping strategies such as being a part of spiritual group, indulging in recreational activities and socialization are employed by the voluntarily unmarried individuals.

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