

## SINGLETON

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### **Abstract**

**The Singleton has emerged as a distinct social category in the rapidly changing Kerala society. The present study attempts to show the change from Spinster to Singleton and the generation differentials of single women in Kerala, India. The study also made an attempt to find out the factors that led women of Kerala to singlehood they have in their unique life style.**

**The focus of the study is single women of two generations, 225 spinsters and 225 singletons. Single women from three districts- Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam and Kozhikode constituted the sample for the study. The different aspects of the singlehood were collected with the help of Interview schedule and the scale developed was used for measuring adjustment of the single women. The economic theory of Marx, Women's economic empowerment theory of Blumberg, Dramaturgical model of role theorists, Becker's labelling theory of deviance, Michalo's Multiple-discrepancy theory are the theoretical framework of the study.**

**The analysis of the study reveals that there is difference between spinsters and singletons in all background variables and dependent variables. The findings of the study shows that the motivational factors-chance and choice of single women in two generations. Single women, who selected singlehood by their own choice and singletons with high expectations, have low level of life satisfaction, even though they have high adjustability in their life.**

**KEYWORDS: Single Women, Spinsters, Singletons, Generation Differentials.**

### **Introduction**

One of the most prominent characteristics of the developed and technological advanced societies of the present age is a high rate of mobility and fast social change. The great cultural diversity makes a range of life styles more possible. The young people of today especially in the urban higher economic sector want more freedom and no strings. Singleness is more prevalent in Europe and the United States and has increased over the last decades. Even in western countries single men have higher social status than women. In single women's experience, there is still a societal inclination to wonder if there is something 'wrong' with women who have not married (Kramarae Cheri, 2000).

Singleness among women is more typical in the west, but has increased elsewhere as well. This may be due to modernization or to a breakdown of social patterns. Spinster is an old fashioned word for women who never marry. To many, this word has a negative connotation. However, many also believe a woman who never marries is a woman on her own-a person who is independent and self-sufficient. A new stereotype has developed of a city single-"Singleton", who does not 'want' a man and is single through choice.

From there, the Indian unmarried women had faced many problems in every sphere of the life and faced low status in the society. The recent years have brought about a great change

in the life of women in Kerala, influencing their attitudes, values and aspirations. Educated, young Malayalee women in the twenty first century are career oriented, happy and are remaining single- all by choice. The percentage of these single women is very small, but the growing economic independence of women as well as gradual changes in patterns of life style, may affect these rates, in the future. Higher education enables a girl to become aware of alternatives to marriage. Legally speaking the traditional idea of marriage has been replaced with a set of new ideas in which marriage is no longer a group concern. It is purely a personal affair leading a man and women to seek social, psychological and economic happiness by pursuing their own free will. The most conspicuous innovation is the women's achievement of an alternative-singleton to the once indispensable end in life-marriage. Young people of today especially in the urban higher economic sector are well informed independent. But the single status of women has yet not been socially recognized as a legitimate status for women. This paper tried to find out how Kerala singletons are surviving and what are the factors that leads them to singlehood.

### **OBJECTIVE:**

1. To understand the factors leading to singlehood.

### **Concept clarification**

**Singleton:** Singleton is used here for those urban modern career oriented women who remain unmarried after the age of thirty-five. It means that they remain single by their own choice or by chance.

Modern singletons were expected to be found in urban areas. For the purpose of this study, researcher has collected the primary data from the Urban Kerala – Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam and Calicut. It was not possible to get a clear statistical record of the singletons in Kerala as they were grouped along with all unmarried women like religious people in the last census report. So in this study snow- ball sampling is used to identify the respondent. 225 samples were located from younger generations (35-50). A multi- dimensional interview schedule was used to collect data and available literature on singletons was extensively used to understand the factors of singlehood. The major variables used in this study are education, occupation and religion

### **Analysis and findings:**

An analysis was made about the social and economic background of the singletons. This would help us to get a clear picture of the singletons in our study and aid in understanding how their backgrounds are related to the factors leading to singlehood. Kerala is a multi-religious society and religion is inextricably woven into the entire phenomenon in the society. It is a dominant factor in the life of the people and has its own code in matters relating to birth, marriage and death. Actually, this situation is increasing the rate of singletons in our society. Our study also supports this idea. That is, the Christian singleton rate is high compare to Hindu singletons.

Theodorson's (1968) study among Indians, Burmese and Chinese female college students in Singapore, points out that in all cultures motivation to marry was traditionally supported by strong sanctions. Krishnakumary (1987) also found in her study that family circumstances, financial constraints and a combination of several factors influenced a large number of females to remain single. However, she indicated that very few girls remain single out of

their own choice. In the study of singlehood, the motivational factor which motivates them to become single is very important. Many educated employed women who give importance to career and advancement prefer to remain single. Blumberg (2005) says that economic independence allows single women to ‘life options,’ allowing her to choose her own life style whether married or single. In Kerala not much study has been done in the field of ‘singlehood’, or to find whether girls deliberately decide not to marry or whether their marriage is deferred due to circumstances. So an attempt is made to find out the factors that made them single. The objective of the study is to find out the factors that motivated women in Kerala to singlehood. Analysis of earlier studies shows that the motivational factors can be grouped into chance factors and choice factors.

**A. Factors in connection with their own choice**

- 1) Freedom and independence      2) Unhappy married life of others
- 3) Did not meet the right person      4) Failure in love affair
- 5) Social Service

**B. Factors in connection with chance**

- 1) Financial      2) No one to take care
- 3) Horoscope Problems      4) Physical appearance
- 5) Dislike sex life and opposite sex

These are inter connected multiple reasons for singlehood. All these factors were given in the interview schedule and the respondents were asked to rank these factors, according to their situation. Based on the nature of their motivation (chance/ choice), the respondents were grouped into two groups- chance group and choice group as shown in the Table No.1. They belong to the section (A or B) where they got more score.

**Table No:1 Motivational factors**

<b>Generation Motivational factor</b>	<b>Singletons</b>
Chance	<b>99</b> <i>44</i>
Choice	<b>126</b> <i>56</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>225</b> <i>100</i>

Out of 225 respondents, 56 per cent of them revealed that ‘choice’ led them to become single. At the same time, 44 per cent of them pointed out that their singlehood is connected with circumstantial or chance factors because the parents were unable to arrange the marriage of their daughter or other related factors. This rate is low in this study. The findings of the study is supported by Merchant (1935) in his work, “Changing Views on marriage and the family” which states that among the educated urban college students at Madras, majority (78 per cent) of them favoured life style by their own choice. That is, the term life style by choice means that they expected more freedom to marry or not to marry.

Based on the ranks given by the respondents to each factor a ranking analysis was carried out. The rank analysis as shown in table No: 2 shows that the factors that motivated singletons to singlehood are different.

**Table No: 2 Rank given by singletons to the factors of singlehood**

Rank	Singletons
1	Freedom and independence
2	Financial
3	Unhappy married life of others
4	Did not meet the right person
5	No one to take care
6	Failure in love affairs
7	Social service
8	Horoscope problems
9	Physical appearance
10	Dislike opposite sex and sex life

### **1. Freedom and Independence**

The term ‘independence’ usually refers to financial independence but sometimes it also refers to independence from the ties of marriage and family responsibilities. Modern society, give a golden chance to girls to enjoy the freedom and independence as equal to boys. This leads single women to thirst for more freedom and independence. With the passage of time, and of the advent of education the attitude of women changed immensely. The education and the employment of women, in turn, change her attitudes and opinions on the social aspects of various institutions such as marriage, family etc. Modern girls realize that marriage is a barrier for freedom and it is enslavement for women. Through modern singlehood, they try to attain, what Marx said for women emancipation, the female solidarity and group consciousness. So they avoid marriage. In the present study, ‘freedom and independence’ factor is considered the most important factor t for singletons and led them to singlehood.

Economic power gives women substantial “life options”. The “life options” mainly deals with two things; “Voice and Vote” in marriage (whether, when and with whom) and relative freedom of movement. Here, these highly educated and employed singletons enjoyed economical power as well as social status in the society. So, it can be inferred that their economic power is the fundamental reason for their singlehood life style. The growing economic independence of women, as well as gradual changes in patterns of mate selection, may affect these rates in the future.

### **2. Financial Factor**

The analysis of the earlier studies compelled the researcher to find out how far the financial factor influenced the decision about singlehood. In the study, financial factor included all the financial aspects such as dowry, lack of economic security and poor economic back ground of single women’s family and their salary as the sole income of the family. Financial

constraints are considered a very important factor for singlehood in our society. The rank analysis shows that this is second most important factor for singletons.

Unemployed women are settled earlier by their parents, but when their daughters are employed, parents become more selective and this tends to postpone marriage ( Muriken 1975). Under present circumstances, an employed daughter is no longer able to help her parents once she gets married, but is expected to give her salary to her husband. So, her marriage may be postponed indefinitely (Blumberg and Dwaraki 1980). It seems that a highly educated daughter may now be considered eligible to take the son's place in supporting parents and younger siblings.

### **3. Unhappy Married Life and Divorce**

In the past, most of the couples enjoyed their married life. But now the condition has changed. The number of unhappy married couple's rate is increasing and it is giving a negative picture about marriage to the younger generation. It can be said that modern single women give more preference to happy life of singletons than unhappy married life.

### **4. Did not meet the Right Person**

Educated employed girls would not get educated boys. Table No: 2 show that this is the fourth factor for singletons. Singletons are economically independent and highly educated. So it is very difficult to find a suitable person for educated girls. They prefer to stay single than to suffer with a wrong guy. This might be the reason for them to remain single by choice.

### **5. No one to take Enough Care**

In India, neighbors, relatives, friends as well as professional match makers may be involved in arranging marriages. Here, girls won't take personal interest for this. Among the single women, some of them indicated their singlehood is the result of lack of responsible person to arrange the marriage.

### **6. Failure in Love Affairs**

Love is very common feeling and without love and romance, marriages do not take place in the western countries. But, in Indian continent arranged marriages are supported by all and even now, love marriages are not encouraged. The present study found that for the singletons this is the sixth important factor.

### **7. Social Service**

In the present study from table No: 2, it can be seen that it is only the seventh factor for singletons. It indicates that there is a general assumption that modern youngsters are more individualistic and not social service minded. From the analysis, it can be seen some women remained single to perform social services but this rate is decreasing gradually.

### **8. Horoscope Problems**

According to Jethani (1994) single women's desire to remain unmarried has nothing to do with religion but with horoscope problems especially in Hindu religion. Table No: 2 depict this factor. It is still practiced in our society and its importance is not decreasing. To singletons this is the eighth one.

## 9. Physical Appearance

Pandey (2002) found in her study that the majority of Indian women who have chosen careers instead of marriage have done so because they are physically less attractive than others. The table No: 2 shows that this is not a significant factor to young generation. That is, this is the ninth one for current singletons.

## 10. Dislike sex life and opposite sex

Respondents were not willing to reveal their sexual experiences to others. Their ranking procedure indicates that this factor is the last one. That Based on the rank analysis itself it can be seen that the factors that induced them to singlehood is different.

## Conclusion

The lifelong singlehood has been a significant alternative to marriage throughout the history. In this chapter an attempt is made to find out whether these single women deliberately embraced it or whether, it was forced upon them. It was found that the factors for singlehood aroused by familial as well as personal specialties. One of the objectives of the study is to find out what motivated women in Kerala to singlehood. Based on the earlier studies the motivational factors were grouped into chance factors and choice factors. A rank analysis was carried out based on the ranks given by the respondents. While, it was freedom and independence that made the singletons to choose singlehood.

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