

Extent of Marriage Break-up and Remarriages in India: Revelation from Indian Census and Survey Data

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Background of the study:

Although, the study of union formation, through marriage, occupies a major place in the socio-demographic literatures, but adequate attention has not been given to the study of union dissolution - through widowhood, divorce or separation. The 'proportional insignificance' of this subset in the population could be attributed as one of the plausible reasons behind this, although in absolute terms it is considerable. The reason of marriage break-up differs in the developed and developing settings. While divorce and separated together forms a significant portion in the developed countries, widowhood form a major group developing countries, especially in India (Rayappa *et al.* 1987). Widowhood is a critical and hard period, preferably, in women's life. Widowhood may have deleterious effect because of the lack of well defined cultural expectations regarding the role of widows in the society (Patil 1987).

Also, the extent of widow and widower re-marriages is not studied in detail but definitely some attempts have been made in 1970's and 1980's. Although there are cultural traits regarding the widow remarriage and the proportion of widow remarrying is less but in absolute terms still there are handful widows and widowers who are getting remarried. Agrawala in 1972 argued that, there is a social prohibition of remarriages of women while the same is not applicable with the males. So if males become widower, they tend to marry with a younger girl while if females get widow in the early ages, they will not be permitted to remarry. In such a situation, the future survival of women becomes very difficult, especially; if a widowed woman has a child in early ages. Not only the women but her children's condition also becomes riotous and for her it is a readjustment in the new situation after the loss of her husband.

Other than that, the study of remarriage contains ample importance in its own because it is one of the factors which tends to reduce the length of the fertile union. There are various laws, regulations and customs pertaining to remarriage and these laws vary across the societies. These laws are mostly based on the basis of complex interaction of demographic, social, economic, legal and related factors (Bernard 1956 and Duberman 1975). In some societies, widow remarriage is seriously restricted, others have refused to officially recognize the remarriage of widows and still in some societies have attempted to remove virtually all the barriers to the remarriage of widowed and divorced (Goode 1963, Carter and Glick 1976).

The problem of widowhood and widow remarriages is of considerable interest to demographers of the countries like India, where widowhood is a social phenomenon. The ban on widow remarriage tends to remove a certain proportion of females of reproductive ages from contributing to fertility (Agrawala 1968). Hence, in this context, the age at widowhood and the extent of remarriages becomes important. Those who married in the population more than once, their fertility level is assumed to be higher than those who marry only once. The extent of remarriage shows the status of the women in the society too and further resulted into the increase in average difference in the marriage age between the spouses.

Thus, the study of marriage break-up, in this case, becomes important for both sociologists and demographers, due to the complexity of its consequence in our social set up. Present study is an attempt **to provide the complete insight into the extent of marriage break-up through widowhood and the extent of remarriages at national and sub-national level for the post independence period (1961-2001) with the help of Indian census data.**

The analysis is divided into three sub-sections. First part deals with **the trend and variation in the level of widowhood by sex and place of residence at national and sub-national level** while in the second part **the regional level variation is observed in its prevalence.** It gives an additional insight into its prevalence across different regions. In the last section an **assessment of remarriage has been carried out for state and national level** for the period 1971-2001.

Data and methods

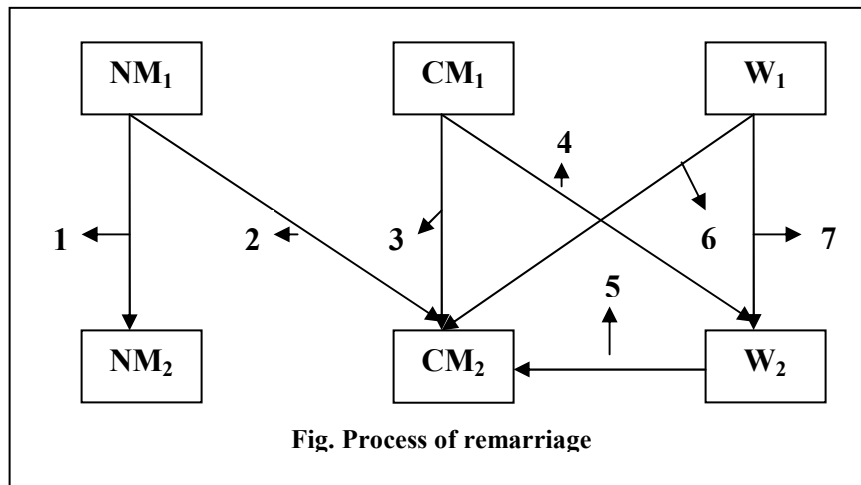
The **Indian Census** fulfills the data requirements for this purpose. For the first and last objectives the data for the period 1961-2001 is used while to capture the regional level variation, only the recent data of 2001 census is used. It facilitates us to overcome the problem of boundary changes for such a long period. In addition to the Census data, some analysis is also done using **National Family Health Survey-2 (1998-99)** data. Using the survey data an attempt is made to study the differential in proportion married more than once by different background characteristics.

Methodology

The two basic measures, proportion widowed and widower by age and the mean age at first widowhood is used for studying the trend and differential in widowhood. The former helps in understanding the changing pattern of widowhood by age while later gives an overall idea about the changes in age at first widowhood in the recent past. The estimation of mean age at widowhood is similar to the mean age at marriage, only the proportion singles are replaced by proportion non-widowed among the ever-married population.

The estimation of remarriage is little bit composite because Indian census collects data on the current marital status rather than the remarriages. In the absence of direct estimates of proportion of persons remarried, one has to adopt some indirect methods to estimate the extent of remarriage. In this paper, an attempt has been made to assess the extent of remarriage, using the data of currently married population by each age and the survival ratios. Proportion of population remarrying is taken as the indicator of remarriage.

The following procedure has been adopted to assess the extent of remarriage. From the data on the proportion of males/ females currently married from the successive censuses the percentage of remarriage, in a decade, is estimated by subtracting the actual proportion of currently married population in second census from the estimated proportion of currently married in the second census. The estimated proportion of currently married in the second census is estimated by making the assumption that there are no remarriages in the inter-censal period. Under this assumption the currently married persons in the second census is either those who marry for the first time during inter-censal period or those who were currently married in the earlier census and survived along with wife during inter-censal period. The transition from one category to another is described in following diagram.



Generally the population by marital status is characterized into four categories, “Never married”, “Married”, “Widowed” and “Divorced/Separated”. Since the proportion of divorced or separated population is very less, so it is not shown here. Let NM_1 , CM_1 and W_1 be the proportion never married, currently married and widowed respectively in the first census i.e. at the time ‘t’ and these proportions after ten years are denoted by NM_2 , CM_2 , and W_2 . Here ‘1’ denotes to those never married persons in the first census who remained never married till the next census. ‘2’ denotes the never married persons who get marry during the decade and hence will be reported under the status of currently married in the second census. ‘3’ indicates that the currently married persons at first census who reach with the same status in the second census. ‘4’ indicate those men and women becoming widower or widowed during the decade and reporting themselves as same in the next census. Arrow ‘5’ indicates those currently married persons becoming widow or widower during the decade again marrying and are coming under the status of currently married in the next census. ‘6’ denotes that those females and males in the state of widowhood in the first census and remained same in the second census and ‘7’ indicates to those widows and widowers in the first census marrying and reporting themselves as currently married in the next census.

The exercise is done for the persons of age 35 and above. Since most of the persons above this age are supposed to be already married, there is a negligible chance of any marriage after this age. The observed proportion of currently married persons in the second census is equal to the i). proportion of currently married in first census who and whose spouse together survive till the next census plus, ii). those who were widowed in first census and remarried same during inter-censal period plus, iii). the currently married in the first census who become widowed during inter-censal period but remarry before reaching second census. In diagram the observed proportion of currently population at time $t+10$ will be,

$$\text{Observed } (CM_2) = 3+5+6$$

In the absence of remarriages during inter-censal period this proportion can be estimated with the help of joint survival ratio of husband and wife. Under this assumption the value of currently married population at the second census will be,

$$\text{Estimated } (CM_2) = 3$$

Hence the difference between observed and the estimated values of the currently married population will be attributed as remarriages during inter-censal period. i.e.

$$\text{Remarriage} = (3+5+6) - 3 = 5+6$$

The estimation of proportion remarried is based on the following assumptions:

1. The mortality differential by marital status is minimal
2. No migration differential by marital status
3. Pattern of age misreporting is same for both the sexes.
4. The extent of omission of persons is same across all ages and same in both the censuses.
5. Pattern of age misreporting is same across all ages and same in both the censuses.
6. There is age difference of 5 years between male and females when the marriage ends.
7. The proportion of divorced and separated persons is very less.

Let $MM^t(x, x+5)$ and $MF^t(x, x+5)$ be the proportion currently married males and females of age group $(x, x+5)$ at time t i.e. at first census and after time $t+10$ this proportion is denoted by $MM^{t+10}(x+10, x+15)$ and $MF^{t+10}(x+10, x+15)$ respectively for males and females. Let the joint survival ratio for the whole decade and for male and females is denoted by $SM^{t, t+10}(x, x+10)$ and $SF^{t, t+10}(x, x+10)$ respectively. Then the estimated value of currently married males and females at the second census will be,

$$\text{Est. } \{MM^{t+10}(x+10, x+15)\} = MM^t(x, x+5) * SM^{t, t+10}(x, x+10)$$

and,

$$\text{Est. } \{MF^{t+10}(x+10, x+15)\} = MF^t(x, x+5) * SF^{t, t+10}(x, x+10)$$

where,

$$SM^{t, t+10}(x, x+10) = \left[\frac{nL_{x+5}^M}{nL_x^M} * \frac{nL_x^F}{nL_{x-5}^F} \right]^{t, t+5} * \left[\frac{nL_{x+10}^M}{nL_{x+5}^M} * \frac{nL_{x+5}^F}{nL_x^F} \right]^{t+5, t+10}$$

and,

$$SF^{t, t+10}(x, x+10) = \left[\frac{nL_{x+5}^F}{nL_x^F} * \frac{nL_x^M}{nL_{x-5}^M} \right]^{t, t+5} * \left[\frac{nL_{x+10}^F}{nL_{x+5}^F} * \frac{nL_{x+5}^M}{nL_x^M} \right]^{t+5, t+10}$$

Hence, the proportion of males and females remarrying in the second census, based on the information of first census can be calculated as,

$$RM^{t+10}(x, x+10) = \text{Obs. } \{MM^{t+10}(x+10, x+15)\} - \text{Est. } \{MM^{t+10}(x+10, x+15)\}$$

$$RF^{t+10}(x, x+10) = \text{Obs. } \{MF^{t+10}(x+10, x+15)\} - \text{Est. } \{MF^{t+10}(x+10, x+15)\}$$

Preliminary findings:

The analysis shows the reduction in the proportion widows and widowers over the period of time. There is a substantial change in the mean age at widow and widowerhood in the recent past. A general improvement in the health care system may be attributed as one of the possible reason behind this. A clear north-south differential is reflected in its prevalence. The regional level estimates also show the variation in estimated proportion of widows and widowers and the mean age at first widowhood across the regions. The analysis further reveals that at there are some places where the difference in proportion of remarriage among male and female is high whereas, in some pockets this difference is low. It indirectly shows the status of women in that particular society. In addition to that there exists a rural-urban variation in proportion of remarried population.

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