

When marriage ends: Determinants and consequences of union dissolution in India

Abstract

The thesis seeks to investigate the incidence and determinants of union dissolution, and its effect on the empowerment of women. The study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the incidence and trends of union dissolution in India?
2. What are the determinants of union dissolution and remarriage in India?
3. Does the marital status of woman impact participation in SHGs?
4. Does the empowering effect of SHG depend upon the marital status of woman?

The thesis uses information from the Social & Cultural tables (C-series) from the Census for the year 1991, 2001 & 2011 and data from the fifth round of National Family Health Survey.

Union dissolution has been consistently increasing over the years from 1991 to 2011. Dissolution rates have been higher in rural India compared to urban India for the years 1991 and 2001. Over the years, separation has been the dominant form of dissolution. The present study reveals that women who are already socio-economically vulnerable are at greater risk of facing union dissolution. Remarriage, however, does not appear to be related with socio-economic status and may be considered to be a personal choice and immediate situation, rather than being a socially driven phenomenon. The study stresses on the need to provide legal protection to women being abandoned and divorced, and introducing measures to ensure their socio-economic welfare. However, the present study warns that access to microcredit and its use may be mediated by family members, particularly husbands who may exploit structural vulnerabilities faced by women to use their labor for debt repayment. Consequently, it is necessary to recognize the heterogeneity in position of women in society and recognize the diversity in limitations on access to microcredit and opportunities for utilizing them. We call for a more nuanced understanding of the issues underlying gender inequality to arrive at suitable policy responses that effectively increases empowerment level and the capability set of divorced and separated women through programs less amenable to capture by dominant agents within the immediate environment of women.

Keywords: Family relations, Gender, Divorce, Remarriage, Microcredit, Empowerment.