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Title of thesis: **A Study on Socio-Economic status of elderly widows in pilgrimage cities of Vrindavan, Varansi and Haridwar**

The present research has been taken up to understand the overview of the life and socio - economic status of elderly widows in our society and look at the problem and issues of elderly widows especially those living in the pilgrimage cities of Vrindavan, Varanasi and Haridwar ashrams. Widows in India suffer from different forms of violence i.e. social isolation, psychological abuse or emotional distress and physical violence or property related violence. The life of a widow is one of dependency on the society. Her position sometimes worsens both socially and economically and she is left alone with her dependent wards. Our society fails to ensure proper rights to its women population, let alone that of the widows. Though there are a few studies on the conditions of elderly widows and widowhood, most of these studies have examined only the emotional adaptations to bereavement. None of the studies were able to look objectively into the existing lifestyle, socio-economic conditions, and issues of elderly widows particularly with reference to the pilgrimage cities of Vrindavan, Varanasi and Haridwar. While doing literature review, the researcher did not come across scientific research available on elderly widows living in the ashrams of Vrindavan, Varanasi and Haridwar in particular. Thus, the present research has been taken up to understand the overview of the life and socio - economic status of elderly widows in our society and look at the problem and issues of elderly widows especially those living in the pilgrimage cities of Vrindavan, Varanasi and Haridwar ashrams. In the present study mixed method has been used for data collection. Primary data was collected through elderly widows, head of the institutions, programme organizers in the ashrams. Structured Interview Schedule has been used for elderly widows living in the ashrams in pilgrimage cities. The descriptive research design helped to describe the socio economic status of the elderly widows in the pilgrimage cities Vrindavan, Varanasi and Haridwar. It also helped to describe the health problems of elderly widow, their life style in ashram, coping mechanism from their problems and programme and policies of the Government. Purposive random sampling was used for the present study. The widowed elderly women above age of 60 years and who were supposed to be living in the ashram were required to be interviewed for the research purpose. Universe of the study

is pilgrimage cities of northern India i.e. Vrindavan, Varanasi and Haridwar. 100 such elderly widows were selected in each city. Thus, 300 elderly widows were interviewed for the purpose of the study. 5 ashrams were selected in each city. 20 elderly women were taken from each ashram who were staying or living in the ashram at least for the last two years. Three types of Ashrams are operating in these three pilgrimage cities viz. Private/ NGOs, Religious Ashrams and Government run Ashrams.

The findings of the study showed that highest percentage of 39.7 of the elderly widows has come from U.P. followed by West Bengal at 18.0, Delhi 8, Bihar 5.6 , Haryana 5.3, Punjab 4.3, M.P 4 . The incidence of such a large number of widows coming to Ashrams' from North Indian states is largely attributed to the system of patriarchal residence where by a widow cannot return to her parents even after refusal by the in-laws to accommodate her after her husband's death. It is found that out of 300 elderly widows interviewed in the cities of Vrindavan, Varanasi and Haridwar more than 40 were from the 70-79 years age group. Caste wise, most of the widows are from General category forming 85.0 percent and rest from SC, ST and OBC categories. The highest percentage of illiterates were from Vrindavan, the highest percentage with primary level qualification was in Varanasi, the highest percentage with pre-matric qualification was in Haridwar, whereas, the highest percentage of undergraduates were reported from Haridwar. The main source of earning of more than fifty percent respondents is from government provided old age pension/ widow pension. However, income from this source is reported by only 14.0 percent respondents of Varanasi as against 80.0 percent each by the respondents of Vrindavan and Haridwar. On the other side, as high as 32.0 percent widows from Haridwar reported income from begging whereas none from Vrindavan or Varanasi reported this. The high incidence of begging by respondents of could be Haridwar due to lack of government support through old age pension/ widow pension.

With regard to the status of mental health, the majority of respondents forming (62.2percent) 'feel lonely' most of the time, 59.3 percent suffering from anxiety and about 40.0 percent from depression. The highest percentage with depression was reported from Vrindavan at 71.4, followed by 46.8 percent in Varanasi and only 25.5 percent in Haridwar.

The Central and State Governments have several schemes and programmes to provide and support for the elderly widows.