



## MARITAL STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN INDIA - AN ANALYSIS

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### ABSTRACT

*Entry into marriage for persons with disabilities, is often more difficult. This study explores the marital status among persons with different types of disabilities in India. Data from census of India 2011, was used to analyse the marital status by area of stay and gender. Theil statistic was used to analyse the marital status by types of disability. Findings suggest that incidence of separation and divorce in disability area of mental retardation, mental illness and multiple disabilities is highest, and is seen more among the females compared to males. Strikingly there is high representation of widows from visual disability which is prominently observed among female compared to males in urban areas of India. From policy perspective the relationship between disability and divorce and separation not only reflects the possible effect of unexpected financial dependency, but also the loss of care and emotional support. Study proposes for a comprehensive framework by socio-demographic, premarital counselling, and early identification of discord in marital union with onset of disability. Overall this study highlights a consideration for future research related to onset of disability, economic background and social status.*

**Key Words: Marital Status, Persons with Disabilities**

## INTRODUCTION

The social well-being of an individual not only depends on monetary gains, but also depends on one's family life. The family is considered as a unit, wherein the support system not only in adverse situations such as financial debt, illness, emotional trauma, but also the confidence to express his feeling openly without any fear of judgment. This is primarily due to irrespective of the gravity of differences and opinion in reconciliation is always possible as they are bonded by blood relation. In a way family has a unit with strong support of strength to each other as well in extreme cases can be a cause of weakness and high dependency on each other.

The question arises on an individual's ability to participate fully in the social and economic life and is often met with prejudiced view. Thus, preconceived notion of an individual with disabilities is a complex process which ultimately leads to negative evaluation of those differences by others, and consequently reflects in social and emotional outcomes.

Marriage in general is considered to be the first step towards family formation. Hence, in a society where there is least awareness regarding persons with disabilities, it is natural that persons born with disabilities are made to think they are with less potential for future formation of family. Regardless of what parents and caregivers believe in, meeting the needs of people with developmental disabilities must always be done in the context of their own norms and values (Lesseliers and Van Hove, 2002). There is some evidence that married disabled persons are at increased risk of separation and divorce, although convincing data have been reported (Clarke and McKay, 2014).

As per law, a marriage is considered to be void or nullified if the physical and mental status of the future partner or spouse is hidden from each other. This may not only be restricted to disabilities, but also other related issues such as skin diseases, leprosy, HIV positive to name a few. Caretaker or guardian of persons with disabilities is under enormous pressure first to settle their child, second with a thought about their future as to who will provide for their child security and care after them. This may lead to families trying to hide the disabilities from the future potential partner and ultimately withdraw themselves from social and family gatherings.

Further, there is a lack of knowledge and a general perception that likelihood of disability among children whose parents are disabled. Such doubts and lack of information may discourage persons with disability in formation of family. There is also a high likelihood that parents out of societal pressure and concern of the future of their children might hide or fail to inform the potential partners. This may lead to high rate of separation and divorces or nullification of marriage, which the law permits if the spouse is not informed about the disability status of the future partner.

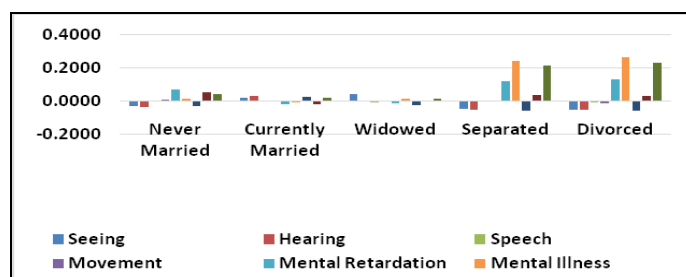
The situation further aggravates and complicates in case of a poor household, which are already under financial constraint and have limited access to technological support. Further, parental instinct to see their child settle down may end up in a relation from an unknown family or from a different social and economic set up. Although one cannot be very sure that such formation may lead to a high risk of separation and dissolution of marriage but the risk is always there of dissolution of marriage primarily as individual come from different social and economic setup may find it difficult to adjust.

This may be more challenging for persons with disabilities coming from a social and economic set up to which he or she has already accustomed to. Further, there are chances of individuals taking disadvantage of such situation and then later trying to take undue advantage of these complexities.

Partnerships and parenthood can have important effects on economic, social and psychological well-being. Disability affects both parental status and partnerships. Disabled people are more likely to remain single over time, although there is less evidence for any differences in rates of relationship breakdown for those who enter them. Allied to these conclusions, disabled adults are less likely to form households where there are dependent children. (Clarke and McKay, 2014)

Persons without disabilities are unfamiliar with the different levels of disability and often face difficulty or unsure on how to engage in a normal interaction. There are some disabilities such as movement, mental illness, etc. wherein as time progresses the conditions deteriorate and are more visible to others. For such individuals, however, whether, and when, to disclose the presence of the disability can be problematic and many a time they are not even aware of the intensity of their own disability. For example, persons with mental illness, their disabilities are generally hidden from others or may be visible as time progress.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION



**Figure 1: Marital status among person with disabilities in India**

When we consider the disability acquired after marriage is less complex as they are already in a family unit. Here the chances of separation and divorces are high as compared to persons born with disabilities where chances of remaining single are high. This may further vary by age, gender and type of disability. Although we do not intend to compare the severity of disability by types of disability, but here we would like to know the differential marital status by disability type. Persons with disability in hearing and speech are likely to get married easily compared to persons with mental retardation and mental illness. The study tries to explore the marital status by gender and types of disabilities in both rural and urban settings in India.

## METHODOLOGY

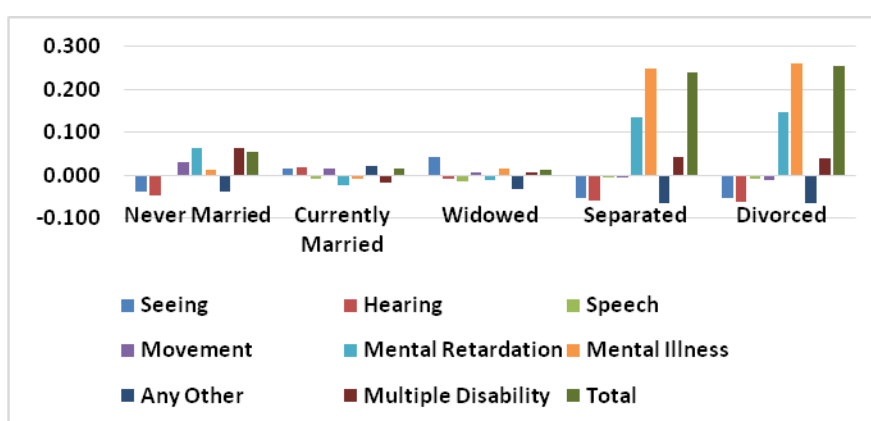
The following criteria have been considered for this study.

- The total population of disabled persons in India by gender, rural-urban and marital status in the age group 15-59 years.
- Proportion of population with disability by marital status to the total population with disability in the age group 15-59 years.

Theil Statistic was used to examine the differential marital status by different types of disability.

Figure 1 presents the values of the Theil statistic by marital status of persons by different types of disabilities. The highest concentration of persons who are separated and divorced are with mental retardation, mental illness and multiple disabilities as indicated by positive and above average value of Theil statistic. Further, among population who are unmarried shows a substantial representation of persons with mental retardation, multiple disability and mental illness as depicted by positive and above the average value of Theil statistic. However, the positive value of Theil statistic derived for

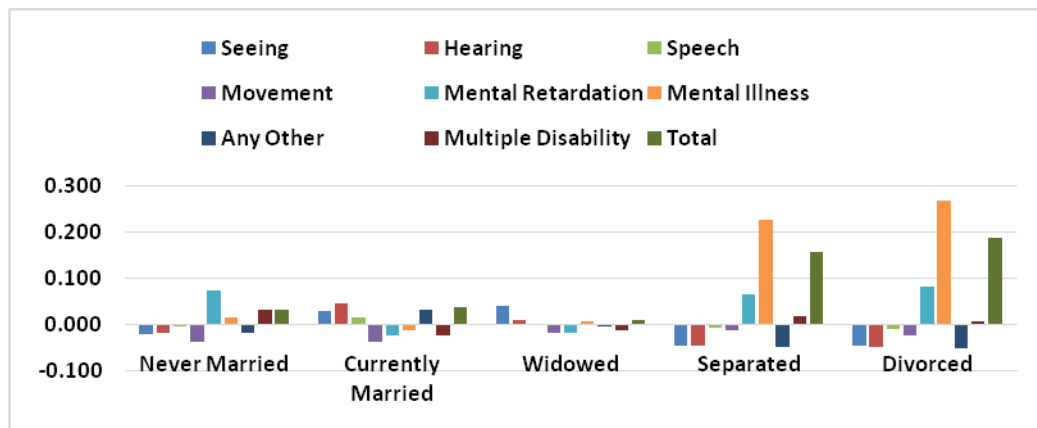
unmarried persons with disability is much lesser than the positive value of the Theil statistic of separated and divorced persons with disabilities. This implies proportion of persons who are separated and divorced are much higher than persons with disability who are unmarried. Persons with visual impairment and hearing impairment are proportionately better represented as currently married, whereas multiple disabilities, mental retardation, shows values of Theil statistics negative which implies below average representation.



**Figure 2: Marital status among person with disabilities in rural area**

Figure 2 presents the marital status in rural areas which is more or less similar to the marital status in total population. To assess whether any differential marital status among persons staying in rural and urban areas, separate analysis of Theil statistic was carried out in both rural and urban areas. There is a considerable representation of the proportion of persons with mental illness, mental retardation and multiple disabilities as separated and divorced. Among persons with

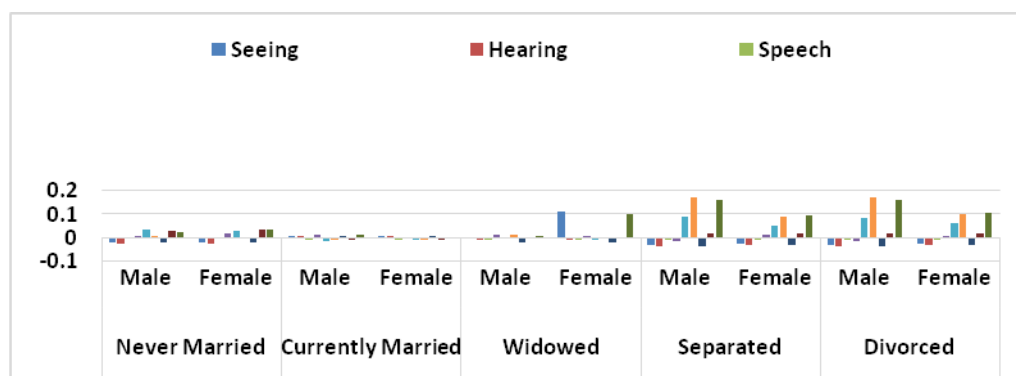
disability who are unmarried the proportion of persons with disability is higher in mental retardation, multiple disability, movement and mental illness. Consequently, persons with visual impairment; hearing impairment and motor impairment are proportionately better represented than persons with other types of disabilities. As observed in total population the numbers of widowed persons are strikingly high in visual impairment.



**Figure 3: Marital status among person with disabilities in urban area**

Figure 3 depicts the proportion of persons with mental illness, mental retardation and multiple disabilities are high in marital status separated and divorced. Overall, persons with multiple disabilities are separated and divorced and are primarily from urban areas as compared to rural areas as reflected by lower value of the their statistic as compared to their rural counterparts. Among persons with disability type who are unmarried as observed in persons with disability type mental retardation of total and rural population the proportion high even

in urban areas. However, persons with multiple disabilities who are unmarried are slightly lesser in urban areas as compared to rural areas as reflected by their lower value of their statistic. Contrast to what is observed in rural areas persons with speech impairment who were less than average represented as currently married in rural areas and are represented by more than average in urban areas. As observed in total population the numbers of widowed persons are strikingly high in visual impairment.



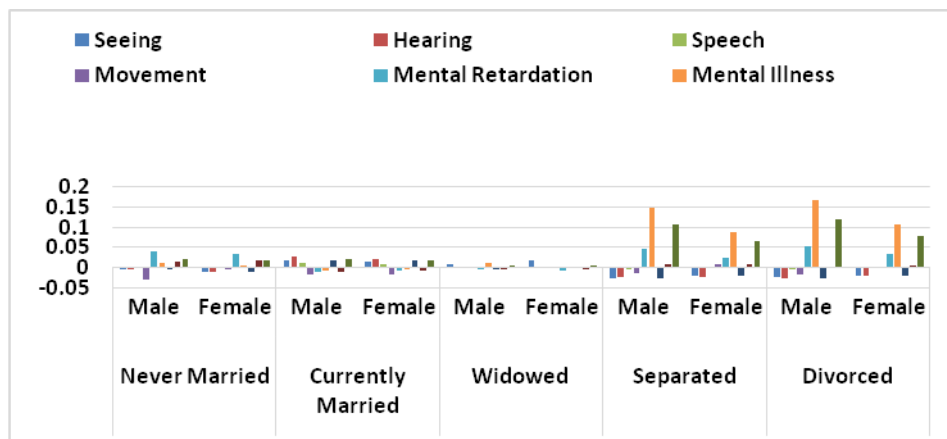
**Figure 4: Marital status among person with disabilities in rural area**

Figure 4 shows the proportion who are unmarried are high in mental retardation and multiple disability and are same for male and female as reflected by more or less the same values of Their statistic. Strikingly, higher numbers of females with visual impairment

are widowed as compared to male. Overall, among persons with disability who are separated and divorced are comparatively higher in mental illness and mental retardation and to an extent in multiple disabilities. However, the proportions that are separated

and divorced with visual impairment are much higher among the males than the females. Similarly, the proportion of divorced was much higher among persons with mental illness and mental retardation, predominately

represented by males. Females with motor impairment are observed with marital status as separated and divorced, whereas in males the representation is much below the average level of persons who are separated and divorced.



**Figure 5: Gender wise marital status among person with disabilities**

In urban areas the proportion that are unmarried are mainly from persons with mental retardation, multiple disability and mental illness. Male with mental illness and female with visual impairment are widowed in urban areas. In both male and female, persons with mental illness, mental retardation and multiple disabilities are proportionately higher in marital status separated and divorced. However, the proportions that are separated and divorced with visual impairment are much higher among the males than the females.

**CONCLUSION**

The principle limitation of this study is the availability of limited data from secondary sources to assess the marital status among individuals by their background characteristics. This research study shows in particular the incidence of separation and divorced in disability type mental retardation, mental illness and multiple disabilities is highest, and is seen more among females as compared to males. Region wise analysis shows persons with disability type multiple disabilities and with marital status separated

and divorced are primarily from urban areas as compared to rural areas. Further, the proportions that are separated and divorced with visual impairment are much higher among the males than the females. Similarly, the proportion of divorced is much higher among persons with mental illness and mental retardation with predominately represented by males. Whereas, among females with motor impairment the proportional representation by marital status separated and divorced is highest. However, the proportions that are separated and divorced with visual impairment are much higher among the males than the females.

This incidence of separation and divorce needs further investigation on the onset of timing of disability and socio economic background of the persons. This will help the researcher to investigate whether the disability status was used as a shield to break the marriage or hide the other factors primarily responsible for the dissolution of a union. This needs to be further probed especially in case of mental illness. Accordingly, marriage law needs to be reviewed, especially in cases where the

potential spouse was not aware of the physical and mental status. Overall, the study recommends a system should be in place for effective counselling of the spouses and their immediate family, especially taking into consideration of the diverse socio economic condition of India.

Strikingly, there is a high representation of widowed from visual impairment and is prominently observed among female in urban areas as compared to male.

The proportions that are unmarried are high in mental retardation and multiple disability and are represented equally by male and female. Further, persons with multiple disabilities and unmarried are slightly lesser in urban areas compared to persons with mental retardation is higher in urban areas.

Overall, this study highlights a consideration for future research by onset of disability, economic background and social status. Future

research should be focussed on examining the association between onset of disability and divorce. Nevertheless, it needs comparative analysis on likelihood of a divorce or separation by types of disabilities and the prejudice regarding disabilities.

From policy perspective the relationship between disability and divorce and separation not only reflects the effect of unexpected financial dependency, but also care and support. Hence, alternatives such as provision for work by providing skill based training. In addition, counselling and intervention strategies that reinforce self-reliance and coping strategies can foster a sense of empowerment. Premarital counselling services to both potential spouses and immediate family members can address marital issues, monetary issues, etc. It is also suggested that the program should focus on parenting quality especially from low socio economic background.

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