

Widowhood: Concept, Experiences and Social Work Practice

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Introduction

Widowhood

- Widowhood is a status linked to the death of a spouse .
- “the difficult and devastating life transition associated with losing one’s spouse to death- is a process, as it “endangers the very existence of a household” (Dribe, Lundh, & Nystedt, 2007)
- A transient phase- loss is grieved, mourned and bracketed(Pizzetti& Manfredini, 2008; UNIFEM, 2002)
- The widow becomes the embodiment of loss and pain occasioned by the sting of death, and her body is turned into a “focus of attention, as both subject and object of mourning rituals” (Ramphale, 1996, p. 99).
- Social death- poorest of the poor (Owen, M, 2001)
- Across cultures, religions, regions, class, and caste, the treatment of widows in many countries is harshly discriminatory.

- The Indian Census of 2011 revealed 44 million widows, but very little statistical data has been collected for other developing countries).
- Lack of public concern for the suffering of widows and their families on the part of governments, the international community, and civil society, and even women's organizations.
- Four UN World Women's Conferences (Mexico 1975, Copenhagen 1980, Nairobi 1985, and Beijing 1995) and the ratification by many countries of the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), widows are barely mentioned in the literature of gender and development, conflict and women, except in the context of aging.

- Despite a mass of anecdotal and narrative information, public policies have not developed to protect widows' rights.
- In India, many laws to protect women have been passed since independence. But it is the personal laws of each religious community that govern property rights and widowhood practices.
- 44 million widows in India (Census 2011)
- Normative belief- older women become widows
- Among the Bodo society- young widows- sudden death and conflict
- The present article will highlight the plight of widows among the Bodo society and implications for social work practice.

Methodology

- Research design: Phenomenology qualitative approach
- Universe: Widowed women
- Sampling: Non-probability and Purposive
- Sample size: 7 widowed women and 3 widow-remarried women
- Source of data: Primary and Secondary Data
- Method of data collection: In-depth interview

Widowhood rites and practices- Experiences

- Socio-Cultural Religious Practices :
- Mourning and Burial Rites
- Emotional and Psychological Challenges
- Dress and Food Habits
- Physically alive but Socially Death
- Economic Challenges
- Health Challenges
- Abuses
- Remarriage an option??
- Structural Gendered inequality across the world

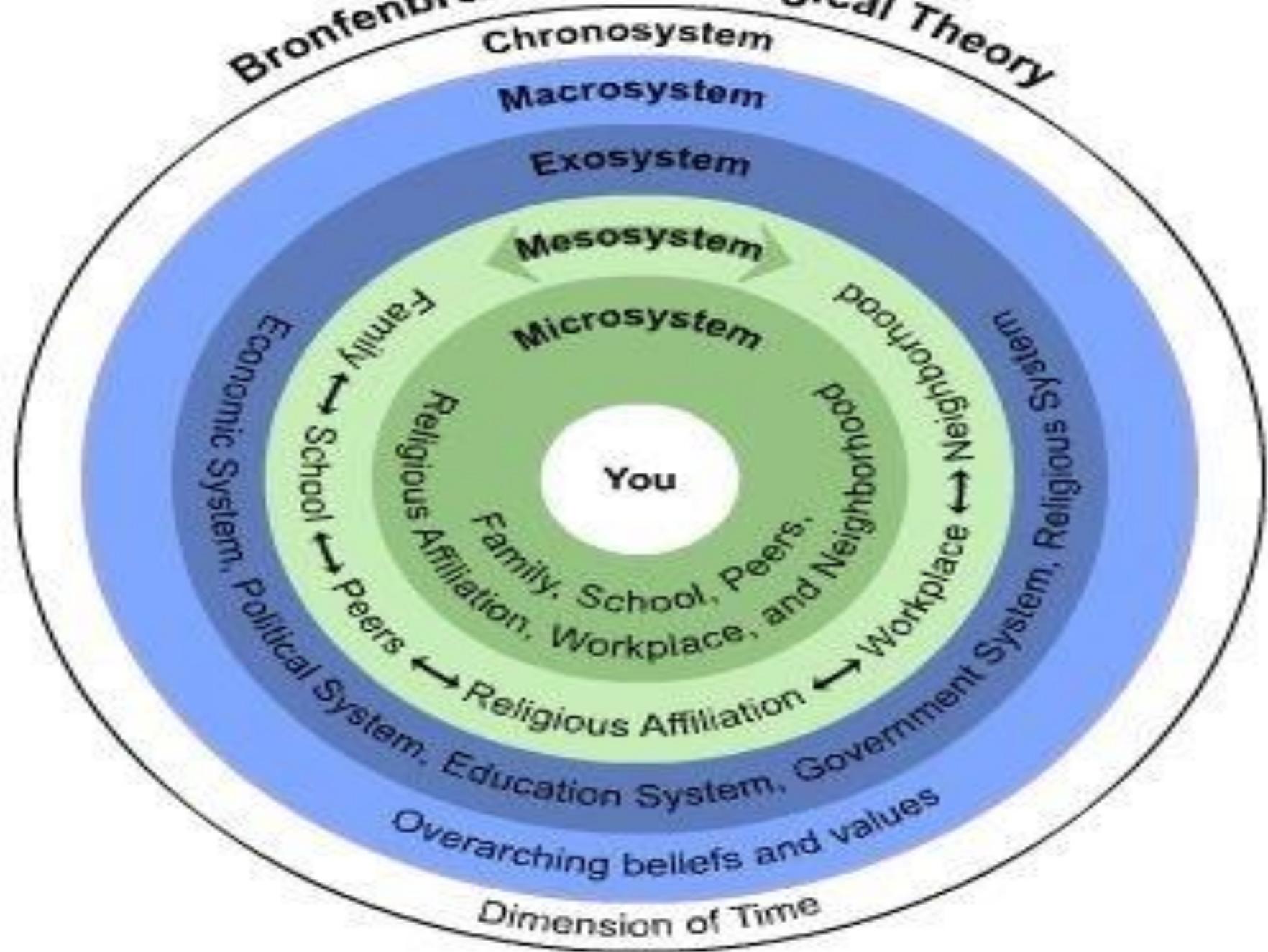
Coping Mechanisms

- Believe in the supreme God
- Children as their greatest strength
- Peer groups
- Family support system

Theoretical Framework

- Feminist Theories-
 - Radical feminist theory
- Ecological Perspective - Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems practice perspective

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory



Implications for Social Work Practice

- Principles of social work practice
- Social Justice and Human Rights
- Social reform and collective action
- Reintegration and rehabilitation- the smooth transitioning
- Strength based perspective
- Resource mobilization
- Micro level- bereavement counseling, crisis management, child care services, income generating activities
- Meso level- Group therapy's, peer support groups-for support system and income generating activities, neighborhood, family counseling, family group counseling, supportive and enabling workplace
- Macro level- Creating awareness and sensitization programs at the community, forming collectives and advocating for policy changes, Social institutions –economic, political, government
- Macro system- cultural beliefs and values system- retaining the good practices and doing away with harmful and oppressive practices

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