The vital importance of HIV/AIDS within the global development agenda has been recognized in the sixth Millennium Development Goal (MDG) which is ‘to halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015’. HIV/AIDS is one of the most complex and multilayered issue to deal with in today’s world. The issue is difficult because of its incurability and invisibility. It is shrouded in the taboo because of the intrinsic relationship with sex and drug use. The problem of HIV/AIDS in the state Manipur is alarming. Different non government and government organizations have taken up keen interest in dealing with this situation. At present the condition has reached a stage where there can be no delay in initiating long term programmes for the welfare and livelihood security of the affected families particularly of the widows of HIV infected men. The present study on ‘Widows of HIV infected men: Implications on Women from Manipur’ was carried out in Imphal district which is home to more than 50% of all the HIV affected people in the entire state. The aim of the study was to gain insight into the living conditions of widows of HIV infected men and their life experiences. It aimed at understanding the coping mechanism of these affected families. It looked into the accessibility of the welfare services provided by the government and non-government organisations. It also examined the differences if any between the HIV positive and HIV negative widows and also between the working and non working widows in managing their lives. The study used purposive sampling to meet 200 women affected by HIV/ AIDS through the 14 NGOs working in Imphal east and west. The research tools used were SES measurement tool, In-depth interview schedule, observations and case studies. It was found that widows of HIV infected men married young and most of them had studied upto primary level. They belonged to low income group and most of them were living with their children within the in-laws residence compound, few were living with their parents. The incomes of the widows had decreased significantly and most of the widows had taken up some kind of employment after their husband passed away. Most of them were either daily wagers or self-employed. All of them faced financial problems and to manage they reduced their expenses, borrowed money and some sought help from parents, in-laws, relatives and NGOs. Those who faced extreme
economic pressure resorted to liquidating their household assets. They had to live in isolation and experienced financial crunch and insecurity. The emotional and psychological feelings like fear, agony, anxiety, stress, loss of husband and the resulting socioeconomic problems wrecked their health condition. More number of HIV positive widows disclosed their husbands and their own status to other family members and especially to NGOs as compared to HIV negative widows. Most of the women did not have any prior knowledge of their husband’s HIV positive status. Also, all women irrespective of their HIV status, faced stigma and discrimination as their husbands died of HIV/AIDS. HIV positive widows were suffering due to more of physical problems and HIV negative widows were more emotionally insecure due to lack of professional counseling and minimal support from NGOs. HIV positive widows were fearful about their own and children’s future. There were some differences in the coping mechanisms adopted by the women who were working. Though they faced financial hardships owing to meagre income but working widows were definitely better in terms of meeting family needs. They could manage to keep sending their children to school whereas some of non working widows were not able to meet the school needs. HIV positive widows could get more support from NGOs and Government. They were able to meet other HIV positive women and could get to know about the services available like financial help for children’s education, vocational training, money for nutrition supplementation etc. and above all experienced solidarity and learnt to cope with family situations. HIV negative widows were also eligible for some of the services but they in general did not seem to keen owing to need to disclose their husband’s status which they wanted to avoid and hence were more dependent on their parents, in-laws and relatives financially and morally. The study was qualitatively strengthened through case studies which gave greater insights in the problems of HIV affected women. Therefore, the government programmes to support HIV positive people and counseling and support for HIV negative widows are called for to provide them with skills for employment and to motivate them to work and earn and live with dignity.