

Understanding Widows' Vulnerabilities in Kashmir

Dr Raihana Malik

MANUU College of Teacher Education Srinagar

ABSTRACT

The status of widows in Kashmir presents a complex and challenging socio-economic and cultural landscape. This region, known for its long standing political turmoil, has seen a significant number of women lose their husbands due to conflict-related violence. This paper provides a brief overview of the situation, highlighting the multifaceted issues faced by widows in Kashmir. Widows in Kashmir encounter various hardships, including economic insecurity, social stigmatization, and limited access to educational and employment opportunities. The conflict has disrupted traditional family structures! Despite the fact that the Indian government has established different schemes for widows, yet the plight of widows remains appalling. It helps them financially, but a lonely widow suffers from mental depression as well. Society does not support her sufficiently, and even her family does not. Many projects in the country benefit widows, yet society's contribution to alleviate their plight is insignificant.

Keywords: Widows, vulnerability, Kashmir

INTRODUCTION

In common parlance, a woman who has lost her husband is called a widow. Widow is the term used to describe a lady who has not remarried after her spouse passed away. After their husbands died, widows all around the world were forced to live in horrible conditions, which made for a miserable existence. Widows' rights have historically been framed against them by particular laws and traditions. A widow would be burned next to her husband's funeral pyre in Sati, one of the barbaric traditions from the past. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Lord William Bentinck's efforts succeeded in freeing India from such horrible habits. Moreover, after their husbands passed away, widows were forced to live inside the four walls of their homes. They were not allowed to join any gatherings or festivals. Their presence was considered an ill omen. Over 350 million people are estimated to be widowed worldwide (Chamie, 2021). According to the United Nations Women 2021 study, of the 350 million persons who have been widowed, over 248 million are widows, meaning that there are more widows than widowers worldwide. There are 584.6 million widowed children in the world, according to the Loomba Foundation Report. It has been observed that India has seen an alarming rise in the number widows between 2001 and 2015. Therefore, in order to protect their human dignity, expert social assistance is required.. Additionally, it's

important to meet both their basic requirements and those for raising. Census 2011 data reveals that out of a total population of 121 crore, 5.6 crore are widows. This is a matter of concern. As far as Kashmir is concerned no reliable data is available on the number of widows but there are few reports which reveal the number of widows. As per data, the number of widows due to conflict (including half widows) is more than 15,000 (Butalia, 2002). However, Shekhawat (2014, p. 90) has placed this number at 33,000. Researchers have reflected that widows face many hardships and challenges throughout their life. So, there is a need for professional social intervention for safeguarding their dignity as human beings. Additionally, it is necessary to meet both their fundamental needs and those of their offspring (Cummins et al., 2012; Zastrow & Ashman, 2013).

Widows after losing their husbands face several challenges in fulfilling the needs of their growing children as after the death of the sole bread earner of the family they are prone to poverty, oppressive cultural practices, and stigmas of society (Dube, 2021). Widows in Kashmir are facing grim conditions-economic destruction, educational backwardness, mass psychological depression, mental and physical health deterioration, dehumanization-of families. (Dabla B.A)

Widows face multiple challenges in raising their children independently after the death of their husband, as their financial income decreases drastically, which is clearly linked to traditional greedy and oppressive social mal-practices such as property and land grabbing by their paternal relatives. (Nkomo, 2014)..

Widows face severe discrimination following the loss of their husbands...A new form of social injustice known as 'Widowism' has emerged, in which widows are discriminated against, mistreated, and marginalized from society. Efforts have been made by both government and non-governmental organizations to address the needs of widows in Kashmir, including providing financial assistance, vocational training, and psychosocial support. However, the situation remains complex, and more comprehensive strategies are required to improve the overall well-being and empowerment of widows in this part of the world. Understanding the unique circumstances and experiences of these women is essential for shaping effective policies and interventions aimed at improving their status and quality of life.:Widows frequently encounter a variety of problems and challenges, both emotional and practical, following the death of their spouse. These barriers can vary depending on cultural, societal, and economic reasons, but some prevalent ones are as follows:

Emotional Stress and Grief: The loss of a spouse can be emotionally devastating. Widows may experience intense grief, loneliness, and depression. Coping with the emotional impact of their loss is one of the most significant challenges they face.

Financial Insecurity: Many with situations, particularly if their spouse was the primary breadwinner. They may struggle to cover living expenses, manage debts, and plan for the future. Widows may experience restrictions on their attire, food, and mobility for years following the death of a partner, in addition to economic hardship and prejudices and cruel customs.

Social Isolation: Due to the possibility that their husband was a major social connector, widows frequently feel alone in society. They could experience loneliness and a lack of emotional support as a

result of feeling cut off from friends and relatives. Furthermore, widows are considered inauspicious socio cultural rituals that has also driven many of them into seclusion.

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Stigmatization: In some societies, widows face discrimination and social stigma. This can lead to exclusion, reduced opportunities, and limited access to resources and support.

Legal and Inheritance Issues: Widows may encounter legal complications when it comes to inheriting their spouse's assets or dealing with complex legal matters. Lack of awareness of their rights can exacerbate these challenges. Some of them remarry within their husbands family so that their children get the right to inheritance.

Parenting Alone: Widows who have children must take on the role of a single parent, which can be overwhelming and exhausting. They may need to provide emotional support, guidance, and financial stability for their children.

Health Concerns: The stress and emotional toll of widowhood can impact physical health. Widows may neglect their own well-being while prioritizing their family's needs. **Housing and Home Maintenance:** Managing a household on their own, including home repairs and maintenance, can be challenging, especially if they lack the necessary skills or resources.

Returning to the Workforce: Some widows who were previously homemakers or not in the workforce may face the daunting task of finding employment or retraining to support themselves and their family. They are compared to taking up low paying jobs to support their families as the majority of the widows have a low level of education.

Cultural and Religious Factors: Cultural and religious beliefs can play a significant role in shaping a widow's experience. Some traditions may restrict widows' rights or impose specific expectations on their behavior.

Age and Health: Older widows may have unique challenges related to age and health. They might require additional care and support themselves, making their situation more complex.

Widows can greatly benefit from financial resources, legal support, therapy, support networks, and legal aid in overcoming these obstacles. To ensure widows have equal opportunities and a supportive community to lean on during this trying time, it is imperative that cultural improvements and more awareness be made in order to lessen the stigma and discrimination widows frequently experience. The issues widows face can be lessened by empowering them by ensuring access to education and training opportunities, good work and equal remuneration, and by eradicating social stigmas that exclude them. Assisting them in living with dignity, and abolishing the patriarchal society and discriminatory legislation.

The United Nations recommends including "widowed and not remarried" in at least five marital categories while gathering census data in order to obtain accurate gender data and better demographic information.

As a result, inclusive initiatives are required in the long run to improve the position of widows.

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