



Socio- Cultural Challenges for Widows: A Case Study in district Lahore, Punjab

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ABSTRACT

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This research study focuses on the socio-cultural problems faced by widows in the district of Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan, and the current causes of their defame helplessness and disdainful status while living in their own community and facing barriers. The stigma around widows played a significant role in their marginalization within society and the community. This limited the widow's views and caused her to be destitute in life. We used a purposeful sampling method in this qualitative research study. We collected information from the twenty respondents through in-depth interviews. The aim of the in-depth interview is to address the socio-cultural problems posed by widows in Lahore. The respondents' widows were of lower socio-economic status. The results of the study show that a widow is waiting for a new challenge every day; however, widows do have some opportunities like financial assistance and skill development through government institutions as well as the private sector. They become victims of stereotypical ideas and face many social and cultural problems, such as violence, family indifference, poverty, depression, etc. A widow is fighting for her freedom, but there is no awareness. This study proposed potential strategies to tackle the social and cultural issues faced by widows, including raising media awareness through drama and setting up an economic package system for widows.

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1.0 Introduction

It is a fact that widowhood is an assault of indifference against the other millions of widows and their children. Our society largely neglects them, and they grapple with issues related to human rights. Widows also encounter negative behaviours from society; their children are unable to attend school, and they often spend their lives as beggars, prostitutes, and child abductors. Widowhood is also persuaded by forced marriages and early marriages (Pemunt & Alubaafi, 2016).

A woman is already suffering from a lot of issues, and since being widowed, she has to face a bunch of other adverse circumstances. Women are still playing a secondary role in the pattern of patriarchal society in their lives. In addition, due to social isolation, widows are unable to participate in economic, educational, and other opportunities. They do not have ownership of a house, become homeless, and face the problem of physical vulnerability as well. People who do not believe in any religion even give due esteem to women. There are many relations due to a woman, like a sister a daughter, or a wife; all get equal value and status, but a mother has a specific status because the mother is the first place where all learning starts, and she provides lessons on manners, language, and relation to blood, relations with society, and so many other things. A woman plays an important role in this world, but she faces various challenges and hardships in society (Rashid, 2013).

Pakistan is an Islamic state where Islamic rules are complied with. The religion of Islam often gives too much importance to the dignity of women, never permitting that woman are inferior to men. On the issue related to reproducing society, women are considered equal partners (Rashid, 2013). Although Pakistan is an Islamic state, women face a lot of threats here. Gender discrimination, excluding women from the decision-making process, and poverty are the major factors that can hamper women's lives. (Rakshanda, 2005). In womanhood, she also faces a lot of violence that produces negative effects on her life and also effects on her mental health, physical health, and productivity (Akhter, 2011). Women spend their lives under the control of men because of male dominance in our society. Lack of decision-making and gender discrimination are prevailing in Pakistan. These kinds of constraints easily overtake the status of women. In Pakistani society, women face some other severe types of challenges, such as the fact that they have no liberty of movement in society, they always have to perform a dual working role in society, divorced women do not have respect in society, and after getting married, women are always dependent on their husbands, and they fail to get relief when they demand justice (Tahir et al., 2021).

Different types of problems have been created for women through various factors. Male dominance is an important and major cause of all issues (Ali & Bustamanate, 2008). It is an admitted fact that if a woman faces a lot of issues around her, then she will not perform her best role at any time. The major cause of women's vulnerability is the patriarchal belief system. This situation supports the government and NGOs in working for women's empowerment. Women's empowerment is a process to create new resources, well-being, and authority (Chaudhry *et al.*, 2012). Work with regard to women's empowerment has been carried out by the government. There are several recommendations that have been introduced for this purpose. The women's

empowerment package says that women can get property, get higher education, and stay at government hostels. It also determines a quota for women's jobs, provides a working atmosphere, provides age relaxation, and provides the same place of posting for husband and wife according to the wedlock policy of the Government of Punjab. It also offers the facility of daycare centers for the children of working women, but for all of this, supervision is also essential (Chaudhry *et al.* 2012). This action occurs to eradicate child abuse and the rights of women. The reduction of these types of activities is a result of global development and has been considered positive for good governance, women's rights, democracy, and developmental support (Pemunt & Alubaafi, 2016).

Throughout the world, India is the largest country with regard to the number of widows. Such widows also maintain risks, practices, and societal consciousness. The world of widows was determined in the sense that the husband is God, and a woman is not entitled to any form of significance after her husband's death. In India, Widows are discriminated since long past. In ancient Hindu law, the principle of 'Satridharma' exists, which means a woman's loyalty to her husband (Ahmad, 2009).

It is a common quote that marriages are created in the heavens and celebrated on earth, but it is not just a quote; it is also a reality because it is a special kind of connection between two souls, and through this relationship they are well connected to each other (Dev, 2010). Marriage is a social contract between men and women who have different priorities and fields of interest; it plays an important role and has an impact on the growth and self-realization of individuals (Ersanli & Kalkan, 2008). It fulfils various desires and needs, such as a biological need, a need for affection, a psychological need, and a motivational need; it provides a sense of security to spouses; and it also plays a vital role in meeting the sexual desires of human beings (Canel, 2012). There are two basic biological foundations for both men and women, such as marriage and family. The marriage structure is set up by humans to monitor sexual desires. It is considered a physical and economic union between men and women that is socially accepted (Rao, 2002). The pattern of marriage varies, but one thing that is common in all societies is that a person is unable to marry his parents, brothers, or sisters (Rao, 2002). Throughout history, the dimension of marriage has varied but still plays a crucial role in societies (Ozguven, 2001).

The widows are sometimes treated in a suspected way by society. Society makes a woman feel like the death of her husband is happening due to her. She faces verbal and physical violence, and therefore, she is unable to attend any type of ceremony. The woman suffers financial problems; sometimes she cannot get her daughter enrolled in school, and she has to sell her daughter to an older person. This aspect gives a favorable situation to early child marriages and other undesired practices. The widow feels she is not capable of giving her daughter a better lifestyle, so she gives priority to getting her marriage contract (Sahoo, 2014). Armed disputes and wars are also contributing factors in increasing the number of widows. Such as when someone kills men during conflict and then women become victims of sexual abuse, harassment, and rape. Widows have to recall the witness of their husband's murder during any disputes, and in the same scenario, before and after that conflict, they suffer from mental and social stress. Armed conflict, therefore, has a negative effect on the life of a widow. In this world, widows are not entitled to "human rights."

They are also deprived of inheritance rights. Violations of widowhood and life-threatening situations are examples of this. A woman still considers herself a slave according to societal rules. The cultural reality that cannot be changed is not through rising globalization. Social norms, notwithstanding the rules, have a greater meaning, but a widow is encountered in the circle of humanity in the pain of sexism (Sahoo, 2014).

Widowhood is a unique problem in Africa due to a combination of cultural, social, economic, and political factors that create significant challenges for widows. Over the decades, there has been a growing outcry about the endemic challenges faced by widows in African countries. This discussion in the preceding section reveals the uniqueness of the challenges faced by widows in Africa. (Misheck Dube, 2023).

Women may benefit from strong community networks that provide social help, leadership, and opportunities for collaboration. These networks can enhance their personal and professional development and contribute to their overall well-being. In some situations, women may be the primary beneficiaries of humanitarian and development initiatives aimed at empowering vulnerable groups. This could include access to healthcare, education, and economic opportunities. Some societies may uphold positive gender norms that recognise and appreciate the contributions of women in various spheres. This can lead to increased respect and recognition for women's roles and achievements. The global women's rights movement has contributed to increased awareness and advocacy for gender equality. Women may benefit from the progress made in terms of challenging gender norms and promoting equal opportunities. It is important to recognise that these potential perks are not universal, and many women continue to face important challenges and discrimination (Ratidzai & Sizakele, 2024).

1.1 Significance of the Study

It was felt by the researcher that there is a dire need for the current study because it was indicated by the researcher that the population with regard to widows has been neglected by society. Even though she is a Pakistani citizen, it is essential for her to enjoy her fundamental rights, but unfortunately, she suffers from a lot of problems. Hardships are faced by her husband. Society is still playing an active role in enhancing the difficulties for widows. For the social problems of the widows, there is very little data available. The researcher reveals the widow's social challenges by focusing on the span of time as a loss. The research also finds out what kind of challenges a widow suffers due to her gender. Furthermore, research also aims to present a view of widows and how their lives are worthy and prosperous.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- To find out the Socio-Cultural challenges and opportunities for widows in Lahore.
- To highlight the current status of widows within a patriarchal society and Social Security mechanism offers them by Community.
- To explore the nature of Socio- Cultural challenges faced by widows in a patriarchal society.
- To explore the living conditions and quality of life, observed by widows and sources of their income to meet their expenditure

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Concepts of Woman and Single Woman

Best & Kellner (1991) suggested that there is a stratified contradiction between men and women, consisting of two fixed features: that men are superior and women are inferior. In addition, these kinds of attributes have dichotomous variables, such as sensible, emotional, decisive, passive, public, private, etc. A distinction is determined between male and female by these types of dichotomous variables.

2.2 Marriage and its transition phase

Waite (1995) describes that it is not possible to observe a high level of marital quality for every married couple during their lives. A national longitudinal representative study found that different variables such as satisfaction of life, pleasure, self-respect, and social well-being, as well as depressed and dissatisfied married life, are often worse than divorce and are closely linked with a high degree of marital quality. Hawkins & Booth (2005) recommended that in many social settings, marriage is regarded as a social contract in which friendship and privacy occur, children's security is also developed, sexual relations are also allowed for married couples, and opportunities for emotional development are provided.

2.3 Stages of Life or Social Components

Bonnano (2004) pointed out that at every step of life, a person has different phases in his life; he must prepare himself to face the bitter experience, particularly the death of his beloved ones. Some people experience the death of their loved ones at an earlier stage, and some people do not observe such a type of experience in their earlier lives, whereas sorrowful people have been negatively affected and combat it with various responses. Some sorrowful people suffer from acute depression because they remain unable to recover from such situations, while others show a positive reaction and can recover very quickly. Vachon & Stylianos (1988) highlighted that assessment, instrumental, emotional, or insightful support are four important social support factors. Received input is referred to as assessment support; self-respect is responsible for emotional support; and instrumental support is known as offering concrete support for knowledge to problem-solving approaches.

2.4 Spousal loss for elder widows

Stroebe *et al.* (2007) describe that psychology is deeply rooted in physical effects. It may not be surprising; therefore, aged widows and adults who may be observing a bad health record suffer from a lot of health-related problems because widowhood is considered one of the most traumatic life experiences. Poor lifestyle habits are more likely to cause health problems and disturb the habit of sleeping.

2.5 Widowhood in a Patriarchal System

Sultana (2010) defined the patriarchy system as male dominance in the public as well as private domains of society. The term 'patriarchy' is preliminary and used from feminists' perspectives. Patriarchy is more than this term; it is a guidance that helps us realize, like all other concepts, the truth of women. (Anji & Velumani, 2013) discussed that structure, which is based on male dominance. In this manner, patriarchy can be described as a collection of social ties

between males and females that exist on the basis of a material foundation and a hierarchical system to construct freedom and unity between women and men. Globally, widows commonly suffer many hardships due to patriarchal society.

Theoretical Framework

The cultural feminism framework, such as Cultural feminism is a variety of feminism that is based on differences with regard to biology and reproductive ability and essentially focuses on differences between men and women. The term "essential differences" depends on the notion that differences in gender are an integral part of women or men; the differences are not developed but are part of the existence of women or men. Cultural feminism mentions that a social structure is not necessarily the enemy of women or an economic force collection of backward values, but masculinity itself (Alcoff, 1988). Furthermore, this investigates how gender inequalities in the cultural system become the source of unjust inequality, economic deprivation, and women's submissive status in society. We recognize and signify by using this construct that tradition and the patriarchal system embedded in Pakistan's society and culture perpetuate negative perceptions of widow aptitude and establish a cycle of oppression. The cultural patterning of feminine features creates a barrier, especially for a widow, and she suffers from a dual burden and faces more social problems than a typical woman because of her gender and widowhood. Moreover, by focusing on gender disparities between women and men, cultural feminism always focuses on recognizing the social roles of women in society. Individual reform, the acceptance and development of the history of women, and the redefinition of femininity and masculinity are focused on through women's empowerment.

3.0 Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature, and the data were gathered through an in-depth interview interpretation of the phenomena. A qualitative study was utilized for the analysis of this research study. The design of this qualitative investigation was semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The information was collected to expose the items and the hardships of widows through in-depth interviews and open-ended questions. The reflections of participants were allowed through discussion of their experiences and feelings about widowhood, social challenges, and opportunity through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews seemed suitable for the collection of data as they provided the deep perspectives of the respondents. The research focused on "Socio-Cultural Challenges and Opportunities for Widows in District Lahore." With the consensus of the participants, interviews with the respondents were recorded by the researcher with the assistance of her colleague.

Participants were given open-ended answers during the interview, which revealed insights and impressions of the social problem. The statement of question was addressed to the respondents with regard to the social barriers of widowhood. Some probing questions were also asked of the respondents for in-depth information. An hour was the length of the interview. Participants were assured that their personal information would be kept private. The universe of the study consisted of all widowed women, and they belonged to a low socio-economic class and lived in urban areas of Lahore. The non-random purposive sampling technique was used for this research. The researcher obtained primarily data through non-random methods applied to the group, and he was able to choose participants via the purposive sampling technique according to his own judgment.

In this, the researcher analyses the information carefully to differentiate the common subjects, ideas, and sense trends that appear repeatedly. The target population was only widows with low socio-economic status; social challenges were being faced by them, and they were living in poor conditions after the deaths of their husbands. This research revealed the social challenges of twenty-five widows because the saturation point came into being after twenty-five interviews. In this research, the participants were widows who had been married for at least three years. The ages of the respondents were above 30 years. All of the participants had at least one child, none of them had a history of remarriage, and their socio-economic status was poor.

4.0 Analysis and Discussion

Widows are the most disempowered category in Pakistani society. In this society, widows are the most vulnerable group. Widowhood takes place for any female as a social fact, even in later ages. Some widowhood commonalities were discovered.

Theme I: Pakistani society has developed walls of isolation strictly against widows, and no one is willing to break those walls. Social isolation for a widow begins with her family members. When her family refuses to favor or support her and makes her feel like her misfortune, she is personally held responsible for it.

Theme II: Widows have some opportunities like financial general assistance and skill development programmes offered by the government as well as NGOs. Future unconcern about the family also indicates that widows are burdens and that they have no right to a happy life. When family members show such behavior, she becomes desperate and does not expect any positive things from others. Results of the study show that according to the belief system of the in-law's family, they have no right to take care of their daughter-in-law after the death of their son. They make her feel guilty for her husband's death and make her realize that she is responsible for the death, and they push her back to leave their house. It raises her self-esteem and self-confidence, enabling her to combat the challenges of society.

Theme III: In the earlier stage of her husband's death, everything occurs normally around a woman, but when she gets into the role of widowhood, everything swaps for her, even her friends keep away from her; she does not offer her company to heal her wounds. The widows are caged in social isolation, so it does not encourage them to think of their daily activities. Food for her children could not be purchased outside the house by her. The cultural compulsions of Pakistani society do not allow her to freely move from one place to another. Gender discrimination is another social constraint that makes her feel deprived of her comfort zone.

Theme IV: The major cause of all types of gender inequality exists in the patriarchal belief system. A woman is making efforts for her rights nowadays, and a widow cannot even dream of having any kind of luxury. If a woman goes outside her house without her partner, the respondents have expressed their challenges and strange attitudes towards society. Widows are becoming victims of public harassment and domestic violence. Because of her gender and widowhood, widows still suffer from the dual burden.

Theme V: The social values create problems for her present and future lives. For widows, Pakistani society has developed its own rules; society generates various types of social pressure

against a widow, such as the fact that she cannot use colorful dresses. There are so many misunderstandings for a widow, so the results and findings indicated that if a widow laughs at people, they become skeptical and ask her to whom you are laughing. Society holds a widow responsible for her husband's death; people refrain from their pregnant daughters meeting with widows because she is considered an unfortunate woman.

Theme VI: Relatives show their caring behavior, but they help the widow after having the status of their wealth. Society does not give social assistance to a widow or allow her to get remarried. Negatively developed patterns of thought: society does not support widows getting remarried, or her relatives say that if she gets married, nobody will accept their children. For the sake of her children, the widow has a desire to get remarried.

Theme VII: She makes efforts to fulfil the strain of single parenting. Her children's basic needs are not fulfilled due to a lack of resources. After the death of her husband, widows played new roles, which led to role conflict for her. Findings suggested that, in the media, the widow's submissive status is frequently depicted. Pakistani dramas are reinforcing the stereotype theory. In addition, the transmission of dialogue also represents the negative images of the widows.

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The study indicates "Social Challenges and Opportunities for Widows in District Lahore." Spouse deprivation has been recognized in later life as one of the most painful and life-changing experiences one can encounter. A spouse's deprivation is not just a deprivation; it's a huge challenge and a life-changing event. A widow, because of her widowhood status and being a woman, has faced a double burden of challenges. It is difficult to overlook the value of social assistance for the widow because low levels of social assistance have been shown to be linked with increasing isolation, tough sorrows, fewer levels of combat, poor quality of life, increased levels of stress, poor mental wellbeing, and less psychological well-being. Literature also suggested that when a widow has to face personal deprivation, she is also deprived of a life partner, a husband, a lover, and a sexual partner as well. Through the transition from couple hood to singlehood, social deprivation developed (Viorst, 1987).

The basic social entity known as the "family" provides a bar of isolation to widows. Findings showed that family lack of knowledge becomes a cause of dissatisfaction and vulnerability for widows. For widows, the relationship and support exchanged by a family member play an important role because she requires the help and support of the family as she gets into the role of widowhood. They show their depressed outlook and reason for survival by feeling misery. Social integration cements their interpersonal relationships that enhance the purpose of life. Furthermore, a high degree of personal life improves the level of quality of wellbeing, daily competency, and socio-economic status (Pinquart, 2002). Assistance from others, such as mates who support a widow in a supportive process, plays an effective role in the life of a widow. Widows are likely to have friends and make friends easily because they have a desire to get rid of social isolation. The literature recommends that when a man is deprived of his wife, he is also deprived of his social network. On the other hand, social networks are available for women (Carr, 2006), but as per the results of this study, in Pakistani society, social networks exist for widowers, but

widows do not have them because the social structure is based on patriarchy, which does not permit a woman to meet with a widow. Family lack of knowledge and poor relations with friends enhance the probability of vulnerability for a widow, and she has been caged into social isolation. She has a desire to get rid of that cage, but she has failed to do so. Society does not permit her to go anywhere without her husband. Social assistance offers a beneficial boost because it minimizes social stress, according to Cohen (2004) and Thoits (1995).

Male dominance exists in society. Unlike the dealings of society with women and men, which cause gender discrimination, It never encourages a laywoman to think about her independent life and does not give a widow the opportunity to dream of her basic rights. Pakistani society does not support a widow to live a live a well-planned life, and, on the other hand, it never supports her to remarry. The experiences of widowhood for men and women are not similar. If a man has deprived himself of his wife, he is allowed to remarry, but a widow cannot do so. For men and women, the experiences of widowhood are totally different. If someone is deprived of his or her partner, then, according to their social structure, cultural background, and family's situation, men or women undergo different levels at the basic stage of widowhood (Asgari, 2001). Findings depict that a man has the right to remarry, and if a widow has a desire to marry, her character is determined under suspicion. In Pakistani society, men are supposed to be the breadwinners. Society does not declare a woman to be the breadwinner. She makes efforts before marriage because she is dependent on her father and brothers and depends on her husband after getting married. After the death of her husband, a woman required financial assistance to manage her children's expenses. People assist her, but she requires financial resources that can fulfil her requirements. "I fail to understand why people do not realize that life and death are in the hands of Almighty Allah and we play no role in such decisions whatsoever. If I had it my way, I would have died before him," one of the widows said during the interview. Widows often suffer before and after deprivation of spouse in both situations; for example, if husband belongs to a poor socio-economic profile, then he endures the highest hazard, and his wife faces the problem of poverty after his death (Smith, 1996).

The traditional values generally assist the elderly population, including widows, in cultural Communities. Joint family structure and social and religious cohesion can also be factors of an elderly assistance norm. By the time societies shift from customary to modernity, it further directs aged widows to more financial vulnerability because they are incapable of to form new transformations with capricious economic and social conditions. There is an absence formal education, new skills related to employment, poverty, and financial protection as we age. Firstly, they are having a lack of financial stability, and secondly, slowly supported values for the elderlies are also vanishing. All these circumstances lead to deteriorating socio-economic vulnerability, and ultimately, it badly impacts the living arrangements of elderly widows (Ali Raza et al., 2023)

5.1 Recommendations

All the recommendations were suggested after the conclusion of this research. As researchers found the drawbacks of widowhood, there should be special initiatives for the better social lives of widows, such as

- As per Pakistani law, every person can receive protection from the government. The government should execute the rights of a widow and take some concrete steps against the violations.
- . In this regard, nobody seems to agree, particularly when a widow is the second wife of her husband and has no access to anything. The legislation on the right of women to the property of a deceased husband should be enforced by the government.
- . There should be some special initiatives for widows, such as an economic package for their empowerment.
- . Social media, electronic media, print media, as well as clerics, with the collaboration of the government and NGOs, should be emphasized for their positive features with regard to
- . Widows social networking and awareness programmes should be organized not only at the government level but also at the at the NGOs level.

In the private and government employment markets, there should be a quota scheme. It can increase a widow's work prospects, which can reduce economic deprivation.

Saba Shafiq: Problem Identification and Theoretical Framework

Dr. Saif Ullah: Data Analysis, Supervision and Drafting

Muhammad Ayub: Literature Search, Methodology, and Drafting

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

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