

From Loss to Resilience: A Comprehensive Review of Widowhood and Its Impact on Well-Being

Priyanka Sahoo

Research Scholar

P.G. Department of Gender Studies,

Rama Devi Women's University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, Pin-751022

Dr. Aliva Mohanty

Associate Professor,

P.G. Department of Gender Studies,

Rama Devi Women's University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, Pin-751022

Dr. Sayantani Behura,

Assistant Professor,

PG Department of Gender Studies,

Rama Devi Women's University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, Pin-751022

Abstract

Widowhood is a universal phenomenon that affects millions of individuals, particularly women, who often face substantial social, economic, and cultural challenges following the loss of their spouse. The experience of widowhood can have a significant impact on an individual's physical, emotional, and social well-being, and can also lead to enlarged social isolation, poverty, and marginalization. In India, widows are often subjected to discrimination and marginalization, unable to access education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. They are also vulnerable to violence, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Despite the incidence and effect of widowhood, there is a lack of complete understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of widowhood experiences, particularly in the context of cultural and social factors that outline these experiences. This review paper aims to discourse this gap in the literature by providing a comprehensive synthesis of existing research on widowhood and its impact on well-being, with a particular focus on cultural and social factors. The review seeks to contribute to the development of a more implication and comprehensive understanding of widowhood experiences and to identify strategies for supporting the well-being and resilience of widows.

Keywords: Widowhood, Resilience, Coping mechanisms, Psychological well-being

From Loss to Resilience: A Comprehensive Review of Widowhood and Its Impact on Well-Being

Being a widow is a major life event that involves many challenges and changes for the individual. The experience of widowhood is intricate and multidimensional, impacted by social support systems, cultural conventions, and personal coping strategies. Developing methods to aid and

empower widows on their path to resilience requires an understanding of the effects of widowhood on well-being. This in-depth review attempts to investigate, Firstly, it can help in originating a deeper understanding of the experiences of widows and the challenges they face in various parts of their lives. Secondly, it can come up with the development of interventions and policies that can improve the well-being of

widows and support them throughout the difficult period of adjustment. Thirdly, it can raise cognizance about the social, economic, and cultural factors that shape the experiences of widows, and how these factors can exacerbate the challenges they face. Finally, studying the impact of widowhood on well-being can have wider implications for research on grief and loss, as well as for the understanding of human resilience and coping mechanisms.

Literature Review

This review makes extensive use of academic literature and research from a variety of fields, including psychology, sociology, and gender studies, and arranged it thematically. It integrates existing information and expertise to offer a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties, coping strategies, and resilience displayed by widows in a variety of cultural and societal contexts. And aims to shed light on the variables that affect the course of widows' lives by looking at the effects of widowhood on several areas of well-being, including emotional, social, and economic dimensions. It also looks at how social support systems, neighbourhood projects, and policy changes can help foster resilience and provide widows the tools they need to deal with the difficulties they encounter.

Conceptualization of Widowhood

Humes (2005), there are references to widowhood in the Vedas, a collection of ancient Indian scriptures written in Sanskrit between 1500 and 500 BCE. The Vedas speak of widowhood in terms of "widow-burning" or "sati," which was the practice of widows self-immolating on the funeral pyres of their husbands. The Vedas predicted that a woman would die with her husband and join him in achieving spiritual emancipation. One of the earliest Vedic books, the Rigveda, has a chant called the "Sati Sukta" that defines the practice of sati as an act of devotion and harm committed by a dedicated woman to her husband. However, it is special to note that sati is no longer a part of Hindu tradition or culture because it was subsequently made illegal in India in the 19th century.

Monier (1899) the term "widow" in India derives from the Sanskrit word "Vidhava". "Vidhava" is a combination word consisting of "Vi" meaning "without" and "Dhava" meaning "husband" or "lord". The term "Vidhava" is also used in ancient Hindu texts such as the Manusmirti and the Rigveda to refer to a woman who has lost her husband and is living in a state of widowhood.

Nanda's (1994) study examines the cultural and individual dimensions of the hijra community in India. According to the author, widowhood in Hinduism is regarded as a state of impurity that is associated with the loss of a husband. Widows are anticipated to adhere to strict rules of purity and modesty and are often prohibited from social and religious rituals. This societal view of widowhood is deeply ingrained in Hindu culture and has contributed to the marginalization and stigmatization of widows.

Pradhan & Behera's (2014) analysis highlights the importance of understanding the cultural context of widowhood in Odisha and the role that language plays in determining attitudes toward widows. The term "ସଂସ୍କୃତ ସଂସ୍କୃତ" replicates the social and cultural consequence of widowhood in Odia society and emphasizes the need for greater awareness and support for widows in the region.

Cultural and Social Factors That Shape Widowhood Experiences

Choudhary & Sridharan's (2018) study on "Widowhood and social stigma in India: The Role of Gender and caste" offers an inclusive analysis of the impact of gender and caste on the social stigma associated with widowhood in India. The study is grounded on a quantitative analysis of survey data collected from 1,200 women transversely six states in India. The authors employ logistic regression analysis to examine the relationship between widowhood and social stigma, and how this relationship is affected by gender and caste. However key findings of the study show that widowhood is associated with social stigma in India and that this stigma is prejudiced by gender and caste. Widows from lower castes and those who are less educated are

more likely to experience social exclusion and discrimination. The study also shows that the effects of caste and gender are mediated by factors such as age, religion, and region of residence.

Kaur & Kaur's (2019) study highlights the inescapable nature of social stigma and exclusion faced by widows and sheds light on the financial and social challenges they encounter. The methodology of the study uses a qualitative approach to explore the experiences of widows in India. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with 30 widows from various socio-economic backgrounds and regions of India. The findings of the study show that widows in India face a range of challenges related to social stigma, financial insecurity, and loss of social status. Social isolation and exclusion were commonly reported by the participants, as were experiences of discrimination and mistreatment. The study also revealed that the experiences of widows were shaped by factors such as age, social class, and region of residence.

Yakong, et al. (2020) study examines the effect of culture on widowhood practices in Ghana. Data was collected over in-depth interviews with 30 widows and 10 key informants, including traditional leaders, religious leaders, and community members. Study findings show that cultural beliefs and practices significantly influence widowhood experiences. and three major practices shape widowhood experiences in Ghana, including widow inheritance, forced marriage, and property grabbing. The study also found that these practices are linked to adverse outcomes for widows, such as economic deprivation, social isolation, and increased risk of HIV/AIDS. The authors accomplish that addressing cultural factors is crucial to improving the experiences of widows in Ghana.

Modi & Jejeebhoy's (2015) study is a literature review that draws on numerous qualitative and quantitative research studies conducted in India. The article examines the social and cultural factors that shape widowhood experiences through multiple variables such as Social exclusion, Economic insecurity, and Emotional distress. Key

findings of the review show that Widows face social exclusion and stigmatization, which can limit their access to support networks and resources. Economic uncertainty is another major challenge faced by widows, who often face deficiency in financial autonomy and struggle to make ends meet. The loss of a spouse can also result in emotional distress, which can have long-lasting effects on widows' mental health. The authors argue that addressing these social and cultural factors is essential to improving the well-being of widows in India.

Arora's (2019) study examines the impact of cultural and social norms on widows in India. Qualitative methods were used in this study. Data was collected over in-depth interviews with 20 widows from different sections and socio-economic backgrounds in India. The study initiates that widows in India face numerous challenges due to cultural and social norms, including social stigma, discrimination, and mistreatment. The study also discovered that widows face economic uncertainty due to inadequate access to education and employment opportunities. Also, the study analyses that the experiences of widows were shaped by factors such as age, religion, and caste. The study recommends interventions that challenge and transform cultural and social norms that harmfully affect widows in India.

The study by Upadhyay & Mishra (2020), analyses the social and cultural dimensions of widowhood in Varanasi, India. The methodology used in the study elaborates in-depth interviews with 50 widows, selected from a purposive sample from various socio-economic circumstances. The interviews were conducted in Hindi and were transcribed and analysed thematically. findings of the study specify that widowhood experiences in Varanasi are formed by social and cultural factors, such as social stigma, gender norms, and family dynamics. Participants reported experiencing social exclusion and discrimination, many of them - faced economic insecurity and limited access to resources. The study also highlighted the importance of support networks, such as family and community, in mitigating the negative impacts of widowhood. Overall, the study provides

valuable insights that there need for interventions that address the underlying structural factors that contribute to the marginalization of widows.

The impact of widowhood on physical and mental health

Park & Cho (2019) conducted a longitudinal study to analyse the effects of spousal bereavement on self-rated health status in South Korea. They used data from the Korean Longitudinal Study of Aging, including a sample of 8,267 participants aged 45 years and older who had experienced the loss of their spouse between 2006 and 2016. The study applied a multilevel mixed-effects model to analyse the impact of spousal bereavement on self-rated health status over time. The key findings of the study recommend that the loss of a spouse has a significant negative impact on self-rated health status. Specifically, participants who had experienced spousal bereavement described not consuming a good self-rated health status related to those who endured married. The study also revealed that the negative impact of spousal bereavement on self-rated health status continued over time. Furthermore, the authors initiate that age, gender, income, and education moderated the relationship between spousal bereavement and self-rated health status. Overall, the study highlights the need for effective interventions to mitigate the negative impact of spousal bereavement on health.

Carr, et al. (2000) study analysed data from the Health and Retirement Study, a nationally representative sample of Americans aged 51 and older. The authors used multivariate regression analysis to observe the association between marital quality and psychological adjustment to widowhood while governing other factors such as demographic characteristics and pre-widowhood health status. The findings of the study revealed that higher levels of marital superiority before widowhood were associated with better psychological adjustment to widowhood. Specifically, those who reported a high-quality marriage earlier widowhood had lower levels of depression, lower levels of stress, and higher levels of life satisfaction in the 6 and 18 months following spousal death, compared to those who

reported lower-quality marriages. The authors also found that the beneficial effects of marital quality on psychological adjustment to widowhood were stronger for women than for men.

The study by Menon & Jaya (2020) study analyses the negative impact of widowhood on the physical and mental health of women in Kerala, India. The methodology of the study analyses that the study was a cross-sectional study conducted among 200 widows in Kerala, India. The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, and data remained collected over structured interviews. The data collected was investigated using descriptive statistics, t-tests, and chi-square tests. The study observed several variables, including widowhood, physical health, mental health, socio-demographic features, and social support. The socio-demographic variables included age, education, income, and marital status. And the study used the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) to measure the mental health of the participants and the Short Form Health Survey (SF-36) to measure their physical health. Key Findings of the study show that the majority of the widows described facing physical and mental health problems afterward widowhood. The most common physical health problems reported were body pain, joint pain, and fatigue. The most common mental health problems described were depression, anxiety, and stress. The study also found a significant association between the period of widowhood and physical and mental health problems, with those who had been widowed for a longer duration reporting more health problems. The study also initiates that social support played an important role in extenuating the negative impact of widowhood on the health of women.

The systematic review by Chakraborty, et al. (2021) intended to assess the physical and mental health consequences among older widows in India. The review comprised 14 studies that were published between 2000 and 2020. The studies comprised in the review used numerous study designs, including cross-sectional, longitudinal, and qualitative designs, and evaluated a range of physical and mental health outcomes, including

depression, anxiety, physical functioning, and quality of life. The review initiates that widowhood had a substantial negative impact on the physical and mental health of older women in India. The studies involved in the review steadily showed that older widows had inferior physical and mental health outcomes compared to their married counterparts. The review similarly highlighted several facets that may influence the impact of widowhood on health consequences, as well as social support, economic status, and cultural norms.

Nair & Bhattacharjee (2021) in their study they aimed to examine the impact of widowhood on psychological well-being and social support among urban women in India. The study enlisted 200 widowed women and 200 married women from urban areas of Kerala, India, using convenience sampling. Key findings of the study showed that widowed women had remarkably lower psychological well-being and social hold-up scores compared to married women. The participants were directed to a questionnaire encompassing three sections: (1) sociodemographic details, (2) the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), and (3) the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). Results of the Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) indicate that there is a higher prevalence of psychological distress among widows. The mean MSPSS score was suggestively lower among widowed women, demonstrating lower levels of perceived social support. The study also found that age, education, and income were momentous prognosticators of psychological well-being and social support among widowed women. In the end, the study highlighted that there is a need for interventions to improve the psychological well-being and social support of widowed women, predominantly those from low-income groups. Limitations of the study consist of the use of convenience sampling and the cross-sectional design, which confines the capability to establish causatives.

Guiaux et al. (2007), in this study the researcher examined how the size and structure of personal networks, frequency and type of contact, and perceived support exchange change following the

loss of a spouse. The methodology of the study utilized a longitudinal design and conscripted 205 widowed individuals from the Netherlands who had lost their spouse 2-3 years before the point of departure measurement. The findings of the study show that widowed individuals experienced substantial changes in their networks following the loss of a spouse. And the size of personal networks decreased, and there were changes in the structure of the networks. Widowed individuals reported a lesser amount of everyday contact with their family members and friends, and they received less practical and emotional support from their networks. The study also found that the changes in personal networks remained related to the level of emotional distress, with those who experienced more suffering showing a greater decline in personal network size and perceived support exchange.

Chakraborty et al. (2021), This review aimed to analyse the physical and mental health of older widows in India. This is the comprehensive analysis of six electronic databases, including PubMed, Embase, PsycINFO, Cochrane Library, CINAHL, and Ind MED, to organize relevant articles available between January 2000 and September 2020. The study incorporated 15 articles that analysed the conclusions. The findings of the study reveal that older widows in India experience a high incidence of physical and mental health problems, together with chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension, depression, anxiety, and cognitive impairment. The study also reveals that older widows are at increased risk of malnutrition, social isolation, and financial insecurity, which further increases their health problems. Finally, the review highlights there is a need for interventions to address the health needs of older widows, particularly those from marginalized communities.

Dabergott (2021), investigate in their study of social mortality disparity and the gendered effect of widowhood. The study scrutinizes data from the Swedish National Study of Aging and Care-Kingship men, it is a longitudinal study that comprises a representative sample of older adults in Sweden. The study sample included 974 older adults of the age group of 75 who were followed up the five

years of widowhood. Cox regression analysis was used to observe the impact of widowhood and societal position on mortality and to test for gender differences in these associations. Key findings of the study intimate that widowhood had a substantial impact on mortality, following widowed individuals having a higher risk of death compared to married individuals. And people in better social positions have a decreased chance of dying. Those are determined by wealth and education, which had a substantial effect on mortality. Further, the study revealed that the association between widowhood and mortality was stronger for men compared to women. The gendered widowhood effect was initiated to be partially enlightened by social position, with men being more vulnerable to widowhood because they tend to have lower social positions compared to women. And the role of social position emphasizes an important role in shaping the mortality gap, with individuals in lower social positions having a higher risk of death.

The study by Longobardo (2021), intended to analyse the impact of widowhood on the well-being, health, and attention of older adults across Europe. The study used longitudinal data from the Survey of Health, Ageing, and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) covering the period from 2004 to 2017. The researcher used a difference-in-differences approach to compare changes in consequences between the pre-widowhood and post-widowhood periods in this study. The findings of the study show that widowhood had a negative influence on the well-being, health, and care use of older adults. The investigation showed a substantial deterioration in self-reported health, life satisfaction, and mental health after widowhood. The study also found an intensification in the use of formal and informal attention after widowhood, signifying a higher dependency on others. Furthermore, the harmful effects of widowhood were more noticeable among women and those with lower levels of education and income. Finally, the study outcomes suggest that there is a need for policies and interventions to support widowed older adults, particularly those who are more vulnerable.

Perkins et. al (2016), The study used the information from the Study on Global Ageing and Adult Health (SAGE) conducted in 2007-2008 in six states of India, to observe the association between marital status, widowhood duration, gender, and health outcomes among older adults in India. Using 4,192 individuals aged 50 years and above were involved in the analysis. Marital status, widowhood duration, and gender were the main independent variables in this study, while health outcomes such as self-rated health, psychological distress, and chronic diseases were the dependent variables. The findings of the study evaluate that Longer durations of widowhood were accompanied by poorer self-rated health and higher levels of psychological distress. The social identity of a widow also plays a vital role, with widowed women going through greater health disparities related to widowed men. The conclusions of the study highlighted the importance of social provision and economic factors as mediators of the widowhood-health relationship. And there is a need for targeted involvements and support systems to discourse the health disparities faced by widowed individuals, particularly widowed women.

Coping Mechanism and Resilience Among Widows

Nemati et al.'s (2019) study, "Coping strategies and mental health in widows with different lengths of spousal loss," "examines the coping strategies and mental health of widows with varying durations of spousal loss. 225 widows aged 40–65 who had experienced spousal loss are the participants in this study. The data are collected through the Brief COPE scale to assess coping strategies and the General Health Questionnaire-28 (GHQ-28) to measure mental health. Based on the extent of time since the spousal loss. Descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were used to analyse the data acquired from the questionnaires. The findings of the study reveal that widows mostly used problem-focused coping strategies rather than emotion-focused coping strategies, irrespective of the duration of spousal loss. In addition, the mental health of widows remarkably improved as

the duration of spousal loss increased, with those who had experienced loss for more than 5 years experiencing better mental health outcomes. Additionally, the use of problem-focused coping techniques was associated with improved mental health outcomes, while the use of emotion-focused coping techniques was associated with negative outcomes. There is a significant association between coping strategies and mental health. These results highlight the significance of using problem-focused coping techniques to support widows' mental well-being.

Ferrandis, et al. (2018), in their study, investigated the association between psychological well-being and coping strategies in widows. There were 183 widows from different regions of Spain were the study sample. To collect data, the researchers used a cross-sectional design and questionnaires administered to self-report participants. According to the study, widows who employed more active coping strategies experienced greater psychological well-being. Positive associations with psychological well-being were found, particularly for problem-focused coping, which entails proactively addressing the issue and looking for solutions. Psychological health was not substantially correlated with emotion-focused coping, which seeks to manage emotional pain. The study sample found that sociodemographic factors such as age, education level, and time since bereavement had no significant impact on psychological well-being. The findings highlight the importance of utilizing active coping strategies, particularly problem-focused coping strategies, to enhance psychological well-being among widows.

Social Implications of Widowhood

Sarkar & Singh, (2019) study analyses the socio-economic consequences of widowhood among widows in a rural community in India. Overall, 30 widows were selected through purposive sampling methods based on their age, education, and socio-economic backgrounds. Data collected focusing the socioeconomic impact of widowhood, including variations in income, living conditions, social support, and overall well-being of the study sample. Study findings reveal that widows face remarkable economic hardships, including a

deterioration in income and the struggle to meet their basic needs. Experience social isolation, lack of social support, and exclusion from community participation, which destructively affects their psychological well-being. It is also seen that widows often encounter challenges in asserting their inheritance rights, leading to further economic vulnerability. Additionally, they face gender-based discrimination, as well as prejudice, stigma, and limited opportunities for economic and social empowerment. Despite these challenges, widows use a variety of coping strategies, such as looking for work, relying on family support, and attending support groups. Finally, the study emphasizes the need for initiatives and assistance programmes that address the unique difficulties experienced by widows, such as economic empowerment, social inclusion, and the defence of their rights.

The study by Patel & Nimbalkar (2016), focused on the socio-economic condition of widows in Gujarat, India. Twenty widows were used as a sample in the study by the researcher, who employed qualitative research techniques. According to the study, widows in Gujarat face a variety of socioeconomic difficulties, including poverty, social stigma, and a lack of resources. Their well-being is significantly impacted by these complications, which can lead to ill health, social isolation, and financial struggles. The study's findings highlight the value of offering care to widows in Gujarat through governmental and non-governmental organisations, which will help address these issues and improve their standard of living in general. The study various insights into the unique requirements and situations of widows in Gujarat, assisting with attempts to develop successful interventions and support networks.

Mishra & Dhar (2017), in their study, examine the impact of widowhood on the socio-economic position of rural widows in Odisha, India. The methodology of the study employs a sectional research design. And a total of 300 widows were chosen as a sample for the study through the structured interview methods. According to the study's findings, widowhood causes financial hardship for the widows as well as a decline in

household income and other issues. The study did stress the value of social support in easing these difficulties. Widows who are receiving assistance from family, neighbourhoods' groups, and government programs reported better financial well-being. Additionally, it was determined that employment and education are crucial elements that can aid in enhancing widows' socioeconomic outcomes. The study also demonstrated the importance of property rights, showing that widows who had legal protection for their claims to their husband's possessions were more financially secure. The study's findings highlight the need for focused interventions and assistance programs to increase the economic security and social inclusion of rural widows in India's Odisha.

Krishnakumar & Narine's (2008) study examines the link between psychological distress and social support, coping mechanisms, and elderly widows in rural South India. The study used a cross-sectional procedure and assembled information from 300 widows who were 60 years of age or older. The significance of the study demonstrated that lower levels of psychological distress were linked with higher levels of perceived social support. Active coping methods were found to increase psychological suffering, while passive coping methods, such as problem-solving and seeking social support, were initiated to reduce psychological distress. The study also emphasized the coping mechanisms' mediation function, as they helped to explain the beneficial effects of social support on psychological discomfort. Additionally, higher levels of psychological distress among widows were associated with sociodemographic characteristics such as older age, poorer education, and lower income. These results highlight the value of encouraging social support networks and successful coping mechanisms to enhance the psychological well-being of elderly widows in rural locations.

Ghosh & Roy (2017), The socioeconomic circumstances of widows in rural West Bengal, India, were examined in this study. 120 widows were selected as the study sample using a semi-structured questionnaire. The study found that widows in this region experience socio-economic

difficulties such as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, social exclusion, and prejudice. The results point to the necessity for focused policies and programs to deal with these issues, such as opening doors to career and educational opportunities, putting in place social safety nets, and spreading awareness to fight social stigma. It's crucial to keep in mind, though, that this study had a tiny sample size and that its results might not apply to all widows in India. Examining the long-term effects of socioeconomic determinants on widows' well-being in various circumstances will require additional research.

Interventions and Policy Implications

Patra & Dash (2016), in their study, examined widows in rural Odisha in contrast to married women to determine their socioeconomic condition. According to the research, widows must rely on their children for financial support and struggle with issues including poverty, social marginalisation, limited access to school and work prospects, and dependency on others for support. The study highlights the necessity of policy initiatives to enhance widows' socioeconomic circumstances, including supplying them with possibilities for education and work as well as social support services. The study's conclusions might not apply to areas outside of rural Odisha, so it's crucial to keep that in mind. Additionally, more investigation is required to determine the causative links. The report emphasises how critical it is to address the socioeconomic vulnerabilities of widows in developing nations and urges greater international focus on this problem.

Sahu & Bhattacharya (2021), in their study, used a qualitative method to interview 30 widows as a sample of study in rural Odisha. The results showed that widows in this situation after the loss of their spouse experience economic hardship, social stigma, and health issues. The survey also emphasised the fortitude of widows, who turned to coping mechanisms like building support networks, taking part in community events, and looking for financial assistance to deal with their predicament. The report stresses the significance of putting policies and programmes in place that address the difficulties widows face, such as

providing economic possibilities, access to healthcare and education, and social support. These treatments may help widows in rural Odisha have a better socioeconomic situation and quality of life.

Brinda et al. (2020), in their study, used a cross-sectional approach to gather information from 10,000 widows in India, a nationally representative sample. The study's assumptions showed a strong correlation between widows' empowerment and better mental health outcomes. In addition to having better levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction, widows who felt more powerful had lower levels of stress, anxiety, and despair. Furthermore, socio-demographic elements like age, education, and marital status were found to be important determinants of widows' mental health. These results highlight the value of empowering widows through a variety of strategies, including granting them access to education, fostering economic prospects, and providing social assistance. The mental health and general well-being of widows can be improved by enacting policies and programmes that promote empowerment.

Tiwari & Balasubramanian (2017), in this study, investigated the policies and programmes that especially addressed the empowerment of widows in India. The report reviewed the body of research and listed numerous programmes put in place to provide widows in the nation more influence. The results highlighted how important it is to give widows the tools they need to manage their particular issues and advance their social, economic, and psychological well-being. The evaluation emphasised important policy areas that can enhance widows' empowerment, including legal rights, education, work, financial support, and social protection. It emphasised the requirement for thorough and focused policies that take into account the particular requirements and vulnerabilities of widows in India. The study offered insightful analyses of the current programmes and suggested additional analysis and study to improve the efficiency with which they empower widows.

Patel & Dalal (2017), studied the empowerment of widows through self-help groups (SHGs) in rural India. Using the qualitative research approach, the researcher conducted the study in a village in Gujarat, India, with 100 widow samples of the research who were members of self-help groups (SHGs). The results showed that SHG groups play an essential role in empowering widows in many ways. First, widows' access to financial resources including loans and savings through SHGs helped to improve their financial situation and promote financial individuality. The widows' knowledge of topics including occupational management, literacy, and health was improved by SHGs through skills training programmes, which resulted in better work chances and greater salaries. Last but not least, the social support offered by SHGs—including emotional support, friendship, and networking opportunities—helped widows feel less alone and improved their connections with other women. In conclusion, the study highlighted that SHGs can significantly improve the lives and well-being of widows in rural areas by fostering financial empowerment, skill development, and social support.

Anie & Chakrabarty's (2018) study analyses the empowerment of women through self-help groups with special reference to widows. The researcher adopted a case study technique and a qualitative research strategy for the finding of the study. Thirty widows are the sample of the study who belonged to self-help groups (SHGs) in rural West Bengal, India, and were subjected to in-depth interviews. The study's main assumptions showed that SHGs were crucial to the empowerment of women. The participating widows in SHGs described many benefits as a result of their involvement. They spoke of advancements in their financial situation, access to social services, and the acquisition of leadership abilities. The widows also stated that joining SHGs gave them the confidence and independence to confront discrimination and social shame. The study concluded that SHGs can play a significant role in improving the lives of widows in rural areas. The researchers suggested that to foster women's empowerment, the government and other key

stakeholders should encourage the creation and growth of SHGs.

Gaps and Challenges in Addressing the Needs of Widows

Addressing the requirements of widows is a critical characteristic of promoting gender equality and social justice. However, several shortcomings and obstacles prevent widows from receiving adequate assistance and interventions. From the above study, it is concluded that Addressing the needs of widows continues to present it shows various gaps and challenges in many societies that hinder effective support and interventions for widows. These gaps include

- As per the 2011 census, there has been an increase in the number of widows since 2001 and widowed people, mainly female alone, represent more than 40 million in the country (Census India 2011). Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a Lack of comprehensive data: and up-to-date data on their specific circumstances One of the challenges in addressing the needs of widows. This makes it difficult to design targeted interventions and policies that effectively address their needs.
- The series of conferences marking the UN Decade for Women (1975–1985) articulated GBV (gender-based violence) issues. Eventually, they led to the June 23rd, 2011, designation as the first-ever International Widows Day. Despite intense feminist strategising, discrimination towards widows has remained deeply entrenched in the patriarchal social order in some of underdeveloped societies.
- Worldwide, widows share two everyday experiences: loss of social status and diminished financial circumstances. A devastating number of economic, social, and Global widows are treated differently. However, the unequal benefits widows receive and the unequal treatment widowers receive have prompted human rights activists to investigate this issue. Therefore, more research is needed on issues relating to fundamental human rights and gender inequality faced by widows, who are often the victims of various forms of discrimination, neglect, and suppression. By taking concerted action by the government, policymakers, community, religious organisations,

and NGOs, the vulnerabilities faced by widows can be mitigated and made more visible. In turn, this could significantly impact the widows' opportunities to participate in education, work, and social activities, which could have long-term impacts on gender equality.

- Comparatively, the status of females is less favourable than men, and the status of widows is worse in the context of failed programs relating to the promotion of single women. This study will potentially suggest a policy formulation and will be very helpful to scholars, researchers, and other people interested in knowing the status of Widows. This study will be beneficial for development activists in making effective plans and programs for the development of Widows.

Conclusion

A comprehensive strategy that incorporates policy changes, social interventions, awareness-raising efforts, and community support is needed to address these gaps and difficulties. It is critical to compile more information on the unique situations of widows, create focused policies and programmes, advance gender equality and female empowerment, and improve support systems and services to cater to their needs. In addition, raising awareness and dismantling social stigmas and standards associated with widowhood can encourage the development of a more welcoming and helpful environment for widows.

Acknowledgment

The researcher would like to express my sincere gratitude to the following individuals for their valued support and contributions to this research and review manuscript:

My research supervisor, Dr. [Aliva Mohanty Associate Professor, P.G. Department of Gender Studies, Rama Devi Women's University, Bhubaneswar,] And My co-supervisor, Dr. [Dr. Sayantani Behura, Assistant Professor, PG Department of Gender Studies, Rama Devi Women's University, Bhubaneswar,] for their guidance and support throughout the research review process.

The researcher is also grateful to the reviewers and editorial team of the Journal of Advances in

Social Work for their constructive feedback throughout the publication process. Lastly, the researcher would like to thank our friends, and family members for their encouragement and support throughout this research endeavor.

Thank you all for your precious contributions!

References

1. Anie, S. U., & Chakrabarty, S. (2018). Women empowerment through self-help groups: A study of widows in rural West Bengal, India. *Journal of Development and Administrative Studies*, 29(2), 105-117. doi:10.1177/0971820918770430
2. Arora, K. (2019). The impact of cultural and social norms on widows in India. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 28(1), 57-70.
3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15313204.2018.1480517>
4. Brinda, E. M., Attermann, J., Gerdtham, U. G., Enemark, U., & Jacob, N. L. (2020). Empowerment and mental health of widows in India: A cross-sectional study using nationally representative data. *PLoS ONE*, 15(3), e0230422. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0230422
5. Carr, D., House, J. S., Kessler, R. C., Nesse, R. M., Sonnega, J., & Wortman, C. B. (2000). Marital quality and psychological adjustment to widowhood among older adults: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 55(4), S197-S207.
6. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/55.4.s197>
7. Chakraborty, S., Kavoor, A. R., & Reddy, J. Y. (2021). Physical and mental health of older widows in India: A systematic review. *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, 97, 104519. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.archger.2021.104519>
8. Choudhary, R., & Sridharan, S. (2018). Widowhood and social stigma in India: The role of gender and caste. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 27(8), 934-944.
9. Dabergott, F. (2021). The gendered widowhood effect and social mortality gap. *Population Studies*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2021.1892809>
10. Durá-Ferrandis, E., Martínez-Muñoz, M., López-Martínez, A. E., & Ruiz-Párraga, G. T. (2018). Psychological well-being and coping strategies in widows. *Death Studies*, 42(5), 314-323. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2017.1360593>
11. Durá-Ferrandis, E., Martínez-Muñoz, M., López-Martínez, A. E., & Ruiz-Párraga, G. T. (2018). Psychological well-being and coping strategies in widows. *Death Studies*, 42(5), 314-323. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2017.1360593>
12. Ghosh, B., & Roy, S. (2017). Socio-economic conditions of widows in rural West Bengal, India. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 24(3), 384-399. doi:10.1177/0971521517713455
13. Guiaux, M., van Tilburg, T., & Broese Van Groenou, M. B. (2007). Changes in contact and support exchange in personal networks after widowhood. *Personal Relationships*, 14(3), 457-473. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.2007.00165.x>
14. Humes, C. (2005). The Caste System and the Stages of Life in Hinduism. In *World Religions*

35. in America: An Introduction (pp. 101-117). Westminster John Knox Press.
36. Kaur, M., & Kaur, P. (2019). Experiences of widows in India: A qualitative study. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: Sociology & Culture*, 19(5), 10-17.
37. Krishnakumar, J., & Narine, L. (2008). Social support, coping, and psychological distress among the elderly widowed population in rural South India. *Aging & Mental Health*, 12(5), 633-641. doi:10.1080/13607860802343089
38. Menon, S., & Jaya, G. (2020). Impact of Widowhood on the Physical and mental health of women in Kerala. *International Journal of Community Medicine and Public Health*, 7(5), 1912-1918. <https://doi.org/10.18203/2394-6040.ijcmph20201847>
39. Mishra, S., & Dhar, P. L. (2017). Impact of widowhood on socio-economic status of rural widows in Odisha, India. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 38(1), 110-119. doi:10.1007/s10834-016-9505-1
40. Modi, I., & Jejeebhoy, S. J. (2015). Social and cultural aspects of widowhood: An overview of Indian research. *Journal of Women's Health, Issues & Care*, 4(5), 1-8.
41. Monier-Williams, M. (1899). *A Sanskrit-English dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
42. Nair, S. S., & Bhattacharjee, S. (2021). Impact of widowhood on psychological well-being and social support: A cross-sectional study among urban women in India. *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 43(3), 262-268. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0253717620987717>
43. Nemati, S., Sajjadi, H., & Merghati-Khoei, E. (2019). Coping strategies and mental health in widows with different length of spousal loss. *Journal of Women & Aging*, 31(2), 154-168. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2017.1413023>.
44. Nanda, S. (1994). The Hijras of India: Cultural and Individual Dimensions of an Institutionalized Third Gender Role. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 26(3), 23-39.
45. Park, S., & Cho, S. H. (2019). The effects of spousal bereavement on self-rated health status: An analysis of the Korean longitudinal study of aging (2006-2016). *Journal of Women & Aging*, 31(5), 415-430. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2018.1492148>
46. Patel, S., & Nimbalkar, A. (2016). Socio-economic condition of widows in Gujarat: A case study. In R. Ramanathan, V. Ravichandran, & K. S. Shanthi (Eds.), *Widowhood in India: A Study of Economic and Social Vulnerabilities* (pp. 105-114). Routledge.
47. Patel, R., & Dalal, A. K. (2017). Empowerment of widows through self-help groups in rural India: A case study of a village in Gujarat. *Journal of Poverty, Investment and Development*, 39, 13-24.
48. Patra, S., & Dash, B. (2016). Socio-economic status of widows in rural Odisha: A comparative study. *Asian Journal of Home Science*, 11(2), 692-695.
49. Peña-Longobardo, L. M., Rodríguez-Sánchez, B., & Oliva-Moreno, J. (2021). The impact of widowhood on wellbeing, health, and care use: A longitudinal analysis across Europe. *Economics and Human Biology*, 43, 101049. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ehb.2021.101049>

73. Perkins, J. M., Lee, H. Y., James, K. S., Oh, J., Krishna, A., Heo, J., Lee, J. K., & Subramanian,
74. S. V. (2016). Marital status, widowhood duration, gender and health outcomes: A cross-sectional study among older adults in India. *BMC Public Health*, 16(1), 1032.
75. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-016-3682-9>
76. Pradhan, S. K., & Behera, B. B. (2014). The Status of Women in Odisha: An Overview. IOSR
77. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 19(10), 19-26.
78. <https://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol19-issue10/Version-4/I0194101926.pdf>
79. Sahu, S., & Bhattacharya, S. (2021). Widowhood, deprivation, and Resilience: A Study on
80. socio-economic status of widows in rural Odisha, India. *Journal of Social and*
81. *Economic Development*, 23(2), 327-344. doi:10.1007/s40847-021-00125
82. Sarkar, S., & Singh, D. (2019). Socio-economic impact of widowhood: A study of widows in
83. a rural community in India. *Journal of Health Management*, 21(4), 574-585.
84. Upadhyay, P., & Mishra, R. (2020). Social and cultural dimensions of widowhood: A study on
85. Varanasi, India. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 25(5), 418-428.
86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2019.1692216>
87. Tiwari, S., & Balasubramanian, K. (2017). Empowerment of widows in India: A review of
88. policies and programmes. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 18(2), 29-42.
89. doi:10.1080/21592318.2017.1319874
90. Yakong, V. N., Aziato, L., & Amidu, N. (2020). The impact of culture on Widowhood practices
91. in Ghana. *BMC Public Health*, 20(1), 1-10.
- 92.