

Problems faced by widowed women and their social relationship in Nepal

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the social, economic, and family problems faced by widowed women in Nepal. 15 women from Ward No. 9 of Deumai Municipality, Ilam District were randomly selected from a group of 65 widowed women. The study found that widows from tribal and Dalit groups are more independent than those from the Brahmin Kshetri community. After their husbands' death, widows face numerous challenges, including a patriarchal society where men are more involved in social activities. Only 60% of respondents are involved in social activities, but they struggle to express their opinions due to lack of education.

Witnesses often work as wage laborers due to limited income and insufficient crops to feed their families. They face abuse from neighbors and family members, leading some to save and invest, while physically weaker women face more challenges. Family issues also affect widows, with family fights often arising over money. Many widows have property owned by a family member, making it difficult for them to transfer it to their sons.

A study also examined widows' children and their caretakers. It was found that 60% of widows are tortured by their families after losing their husbands, and when their husbands die, they are blamed for their husband's death. Despite efforts by government and non-government groups, society's treatment towards widows remains poor.

While the problems faced by widows have reduced in recent years, conservative traditional beliefs and views remain deeply rooted in society. Government and non-government organizations are working to help these women, but the societal attitudes towards widows remain unchanged.

Keywords: *Widowed women, Problems of widowed, Social relationship of widowed, Widowed in Nepal*

1.1 Introduction

Nepal has numerous traditions that encourage abuse against women, including the Kumari tradition, widow tradition, Chhaupadi tradition, and Jhuma tradition. The widow tradition is being examined in this research project, as it involves women who have lost their husbands by death and have not remarried. In Nepali society, women are often placed in a secondary position,

with widowed women marginalized to an even lower status. Women make up 51.1% of the population, but many widowed women get disregarded by their families and society just because they have lost their spouses.

In ancient texts, women should live under the rule of their fathers until they get married, their husbands after they get married, and their kids when they get old. However, Nepali culture still holds onto traditional, strict cultural and social views, making social life difficult for women. Women are often forced to have 9 to 10 daughters because they couldn't have sons, and later, they are thrown out of the house, tortured mentally and physically, while their husband marries again in search of a son. This highlights how Nepali culture prioritizes men over women.

The word "widow" comes from the Vedic tongue and has evolved into an Indo-European language. It is called Vidhuvi or Vidhuvi in Nepal and Randi in Maithili society. Single women have been expected to give up their sindur, pote, rings, and even the red color, which is thought to bring good luck. Many people in rural areas think that single women are weak and lost, but they also think that they can't do anything when they are mistreated or abused. (Thapa, 2066).

Nepal has a large number of single women, with different castes having different numbers of widows. People treat single women differently in society, with them feeling alone and lacking support and love from their family and friends. Hindu folklore treats women with respect sometimes, but they are also looked down upon or put in lower positions other times. Women are seen as a spiritual power in Hinduism, a sign of knowledge and kindness. However, they are not allowed to live on their own, are excluded from cultural, social, and economic activities, and are not even involved in making family decisions.

Patriarchy is a system in which men abuse, discriminate against, or control women. In Nepal, women make up 51.1% of the population, but they face challenges in family dynamics, social relationships, and economic hardships.

1.2 Review of Related Literature

This study explores the challenges faced by women after losing a spouse, their interactions with family, and their relationship with society. Women are often mistreated and categorized into three groups: equal chances, exceptions, and equal opportunities. Women often face physical and emotional abuse, insults, sexual abuse, and lack of access to resources. Society places men in the first class, women in the second, and single women in the third. Witnesses face various challenges, including being kicked out of the house, blamed for their husband's death, and being unable to prove their relationship. They are also often looked down upon by society and

considered a crime. The death of a life partner affects women of all races, faiths, and languages, and traditional and religious rules are often followed. (Pandey, 2066).

Society classifies men as the first class, women as the second, and single women as the third. Single women face various challenges, including being blamed for husbands' deaths, being kicked out of homes, and facing mental torture. Older widowed women are also seen with suspicion. (Rijal, 2060). Grief and stress are common after a husband's death, affecting women of all ages, races, and religions. Following traditional rules, being away from family, and dealing with societal pressures can significantly impact a single woman's mental health, leading to feelings of inadequacy and stress. (Thapa, 2069). Women are often mistreated and underrepresented in society. Three theories have been proposed to help them: equal chances, exceptions, and equal opportunities. Women often get lower-level jobs and earn less money. Society needs to change to provide equal opportunities for women, including land and shares. Property plays a significant role in shaping a person's identity and future family life. Changing society will help women achieve equal success and opportunities. (Mishra, 2010). In Nepal, society values both husband and wife, with the son being the head of the house if the father dies. This patriarchal thinking leads to inequality, as widows are not allowed to do auspicious work. This inequality is rooted in a society ruled by men. (Thapa, 2062) Studies in the 1980s revealed that women in Nepal perform more housework, have less decision-making power, and have limited access to education. This gender inequality, particularly among Hindu Brahmin and Kshetri groups, hinders girls' education, independence, and job opportunities. The country's diverse ethnic groups, cultures, and languages further complicate the situation. A more modern approach to society and culture is needed. (Acharya M. and L. Bennelt, 1981). Kate Millett's work, *Sexual Politics*, posits that women's perceived weakness is socially constructed, not biological. Patriarchy and false beliefs about women's inferiority contribute to their marginalization. In 2066, the government introduced a social security grant of Rs. 53,000 for widows, but this faced opposition. Critics argued it undermined widows' dignity and self-respect, treating them as objects to be rescued for monetary gain. This issue sparked a debate on respect, independence, and the meaning of marriage in 2067.

1.3 Review of the Theories

Patriarchal abuse and exploitation have persisted since civilization's beginnings, neglecting women's role in art, literature, and theory. Feminism, a movement advocating for equal opportunities for women, emerged in the 18th century. The first Women's Rights Conference

in 1848 highlighted the ongoing unfair treatment of women, leading to a call for equality in 1980. (Shreshtha, 2060). The Reformation and Renaissance in Britain in the 1700s changed women's perceptions, leading to the women's movement in the 1960s. Simon's book *The Second Sex* and Betty Friedan's book *The Feminist Mystique*, published in 1949 and 1963 respectively, challenged traditional gender ideas and sparked the feminist movement, pushing women to fight for their rights. (Pokharel, 2060). Liberal feminism, which emerged in the 1600s and 1700s, advocated for individual freedom and civil liberties in the 1800s. Since 1950, it has focused on changing social, economic, and political relationships. Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill argued for women's freedom in areas like work and education. Liberal feminists prioritize fair gender and social fairness over people's rights, advocating for more freedom within existing systems. (Single Women's Group, 2062). Karl Marx and Frederick Engels's "Origin of the Family. Private Property and the State" explores Marxist feminism's history and development. It argues that class-based analysis can address oppression, discrimination, and inequality against women, primarily due to patriarchy and capitalist structures, and class and social conflicts are primarily caused by ruling class tendencies. (Acharya, 2067). Marxist feminists advocate for women's rights and the elimination of gender discrimination through the end of private property ownership. They believe that class oppression must be eliminated to create a classless society. They criticize the capitalist system's division of labor at the household level, arguing that domestic work is exploited and not productive, and that this is the purpose of capitalist production. (Anderson, M.L. and Taylor H,F 2009).

1.4 Review of the Evidence

Patriarchy is a system in which men abuse, discriminate against, or rule over women. Most families in the world are patriarchal, which is why women and men have not reached equal status within the family. Because of different social and cultural norms, women have been abused by men and by women even within the same family (Bhasin, 1993).

In Hinduism, a son is wanted to keep the family line going. In a patriarchal society, a son is an important part of rituals like offering incense to parents and Shraddha. In marriage rituals, women are seen as less important than men because they are known by the name of their father before they get married, then by the name of their husband, and finally by the name of their son after their husband dies. This makes single women feel like they don't have a sense of who they are (Thapa, 2062).

Advocate Geeta Koirala says that the economy needs to get better before single women can be given more power. She also says that widowed women can be given more power in other areas, like politics, but only if the economy gets better first. To do that, they need to be given the right training and job opportunities should be made available. Regmi, 2063.

In Nepali society, especially Hindu society, daughters are treated differently than sons. This makes it harder for daughters to get an education, become independent, get a job, etc. Daughters-in-law are also treated badly. The traditional view of society and culture needs to be changed to a more modern view (Acharya M. and L. Bennelt, 1981)1.

Reviewing literature from different areas shows that gender discrimination still exists in society. In the capitalist system, families have been exploited for their labor. Widowed women have a hard time making a living because society and their families don't care about them and they don't have the skills to do so. Many groups have tried to end exploitation of women and inequality between men and women, but women are still far behind men in social, economic, and educational areas.

1.5 Framework for Ideas

This study's main goal is to find out what problems widowed women face, how they see them, and why family members act differently before and after a woman becomes a widow. To do this, widowed women from Ward No. 09 of Deumai Municipality were chosen. Different castes and tribes in society have different views and behaviors towards widowed women. A widow's social, economic, and family status is affected by her caste, education, profession, family structure, the relationship between society and family, her ability to make decisions, her religion, culture, etc.

1.6 Aspects not studied

A lot of research has been done on the social, economic, and cultural conditions of Nepali women, but not much on the problems widowed women face and their relationships with family and society. This study is different from others because it looks at why society and family act differently before and after a husband dies.

Problems faced by widows and social relations

In Nepal, widows face numerous challenges, including living alone, raising children, and managing finances. They are often viewed as unlucky and remarried as a crime. This study focuses on the socio-economic and family problems of widowed women in Ilam District,

Deumai Municipality Ward No. 09, examining their relationships with family and society. The data from the field study is interpreted and analyzed in this section.

1.6.1 Issues with Society

In Nepali culture, the presence of both husband and wife is crucial for good deeds, and single women often face problems such as being beaten, insulted, sexually abused, and facing lack of food. The connection between a person's family and neighborhood significantly impacts their life. A widow who lost her husband experienced a weak connection with her family and neighborhood, as her brother-in-law refused to help her plough the field. The relationship between widowed women and their families and neighbors also varies depending on the society they live in. Women in families with weak economic conditions and no male relatives at home often lose their relationships with their families and neighbors after their husbands' death. Many widows believe that the respect for their husbands has faded after their husbands' death.

In Hinduism, marriage vows and pujas are rituals, but it is considered bad for widows to attend these events due to tradition. Widows face difficulties in attending these events, such as touching worship objects or offering alms. In the Brahmin community, widows face restrictions on attending weddings, fasts, and pujas, while in the Dalit community, women are only allowed to participate in religious or cultural activities one year after their husband's death.

Widows should be allowed to participate in meetings, but 70% of them are not able to do so due to societal expectations. 30% of widows attend social events, but the current social structure puts women second and widows third. Women who can speak and write a few words are free to attend.

Men, women, and widows should all have equal opportunities to participate in community development projects, but patriarchal norms often limit women's involvement. Addressing barriers and ensuring equal participation for all is crucial.

Increasing people's real freedom is what makes them happy, and development should be linked to different parts of society to promote human development. By addressing poverty, corruption, superstition, dictatorship, and monopoly, both development and change can be achieved.

1.6.2 Problems with Money

In society, widows face numerous financial challenges when their main breadwinner dies, leaving the family struggling to make ends meet. This often leads to the widow carrying most of the financial burden, which can result in some widows accepting the happiness of their own family members, while others have to leave home and stay with relatives. Others may beg for

help from relatives, live as toys for others, or even kill themselves.

Land ownership is a significant factor in the economic situation of widowed women. Most of the land owned by widowed women is owned by their families, and the widowed women themselves own the land. This study focuses on land ownership in two ways: first, the land is owned by the families of the widowed women, and second, the widowed women own the land. Widows who do not own land in their name face numerous problems, such as giving their land to their sons, living alone, and building a small house in their name. Another widow shares her experience of losing her husband's land after a few years, and how she had to build one on her mother's land.

Very few widows have worked while they were married and made money, while those who had to live alone due to their husbands and families' lack of care and who did not have children also claim that their land is in their own name.

In conclusion, widows face numerous financial challenges in society, including the loss of a main breadwinner, the burden of financial responsibility, and the struggle to support their families. Understanding the economic situation of widowed women is crucial for understanding their struggles and finding solutions to these challenges.

Widows in Nepal often own their land in the name of their families, which can be a source of income for them. However, they struggle to get land on their own, often giving it to their sons after their husbands' deaths. The lack of a male helper in their home and the limited work opportunities for widowed women also contribute to their financial struggles.

Women's professions, such as agriculture, play a significant role in their lives. In Nepal, many widows work in agriculture, while men run the household. The way poor people live is heavily influenced by natural resources, lack of skills, education, mental awareness, traditional structures, and lack of involvement in government policies.

To improve the lives of backward and marginalized castes and communities in Nepal, a capacity-based development approach and development-oriented livelihood strategies should be implemented. In Chitwan, widows have been given hope and motivation to live a hard life, with some working in agriculture and animal care.

The level of employment for widowed women in Nepal is low compared to the country's society, with most working as wage laborers or in agriculture. Only three of these women have jobs, and they often struggle to find work due to lack of skills, knowledge, or schooling. Many widows are single-parent families, which means they have more work to do daily.

The main source of income for widows is farming, animal husbandry, or wage labor. They raise goats and chickens, sell them when needed, and use their widow's allowance to pay bills. Some widows also work for money, but sick or injured widows only receive the widow's pension.

Witnesses in the study area make money through farming, taking care of animals, and some work for money. However, they may not be able to make money from the widow's grant.

The financial situation of widows is complex, with low incomes covering their endless needs. They have to run the family by themselves, spending money on everything from food to healthcare and schooling. In joint families, widows receive money from other family members but spend it on food, clothes, and health.

In single-parent families, there is only one income source, and the single parent pays for everything the family needs. However, their income doesn't cover their costs, and widows' costs are higher than their income. Despite this, many widows continue to fight for themselves and their families.

Widows often struggle to make money on their own, and their families do not. They rely on borrowing money from family, neighbors, and groups to pay for their daily needs and bills. This can be difficult for widowed women who live alone, who only have to spend money on themselves.

To save money, some women cut back on daily costs, such as buying goats, chickens, raising them, and selling them. However, many widowed women in the study area have health problems and find it hard to make ends meet, making it difficult for them to save and invest. Working-age women in the study area save some money even after cutting back on daily costs. Women who are sick and lack a job also struggle to save or spend much money. Overall, understanding the struggles faced by widowed women is crucial for understanding their financial situation and addressing the challenges they face.

1.6.3 Problems with family

In a family, roles for men and women vary, with husbands, wives, sons, daughters, sons-in-law, and parents having different responsibilities. Women in the study area have different family structures, with some having daughters, sons, or no children at all. Widows without sons often feel left alone at home when their daughters get married, while widows with children may also live alone. They wish they had at least one son and feel Family relationships are crucial for understanding family problems and conflicts. One woman reported her husband's death was

caused by family conflict. Understanding these aspects can help address the challenges faced by widows and help them navigate their lives.

While conducting this research a woman said that her husband's death was caused by family conflict. She said, "My husband liked drinking and playing cards. One day, I told him to harvest maize, but he refused, saying that harvesting is a woman's job. That night, he came home late. I told him that I was feeling exhausted from working all day and asked if he could come home earlier from tomorrow. Then he started beating me up, and my sons weren't at home either. The next day, my sons came home. I told them what had happened, and they scolded me, asking, 'why do you fight everyday even in your old-age?' I didn't hear all the words they said. My husband then left the house and went to hang himself a little far from home. After her husband's death, she gave her sons a share of the property but it made them fight each other due to misbalance of property. The story highlights the importance of living together for good family relations, and the impact of family arguments on relationships. Most widowed women in the study area have good relationships, but some face problems due to poverty, unemployment, gambling, or drug abuse.

In Nepal, women are taught to prioritize family members, leading to poor health and health issues for widowed women. They often eat after everyone else, leading to overwork, anxiety, and limited access to healthy food. When sick, their sons and daughter-in-law take care of them, often working long hours and causing them to be hungry. Those without sons often have daughters or sisters-in-law who live with them, while those without sons have daughters or sisters-in-law. This lack of support can lead to health problems for widowed women, highlighting the need for better support and resources for their well-being. In Nepali culture, both husband and wife should be at good deed, and widows often face negative treatment from their families. A study found that 60% of widows in the study area report that their families' attitudes and behaviors have worsened since their husband's death. Widows experience physical and mental torture, with their family members acting poorly. Some widows report rude and mean behavior before and after their husband's death, while others from educated families show respect and support. Education also plays a role in how widows are treated, with uneducated families often treating them poorly, while educated families offer support and encouragement. In a patriarchal society, women are often stopped from moving forward, and they are often banned from religious activities. In Nepalese society, traditional and conservative, abusive words are used against the wife after her husband's death, and she is tortured mentally and

physically. Understanding how widows relate to family and friends is crucial in addressing the issues they face in Nepal. Society seems to have a bad view of widows; especially, religious activities are limited. Widows without children are more likely to be tortured than widows with children. Even though there has been talk of change, society's view and behavior towards widows in the study area has not changed.

1.6.4 A Brief Outline of the Study

This study aims to explore the social, economic, and family problems faced by widowed women in Nepal. 15 women from Ward No. 9 of Deumai Municipality, Ilam District were chosen randomly from a group of 65 widowed women. The study found that widows from tribal and Dalit groups are more independent than those from the Brahmin Kshetri community. The study also revealed that Nepal's patriarchal society leads to men being more involved in social activities, but widows struggle to express their opinions due to lack of education. Most widows work in agriculture, animal care, or wage labor, as their crops are insufficient to feed their families. Their income is limited, and they often beg for money from neighbors and family members. Some women have started saving and investing, while physically weaker women face more challenges. Family issues, such as money disputes, are also a concern for widowed women. Many widows have property owned by family members, making it difficult to transfer it to their sons.

It was found that 60% of the women in the study area are tortured badly by their families after losing their husbands. When their husbands die, they get blamed for their husband's death. Women from educated families, on the other hand, are treated well by their families.

It seems that society's treatment towards widows who don't have children is still very bad. It doesn't matter how much people talk about change, society's behavior towards widows in the Tarpan the study area has not changed.

It has been found that the problems faced by widows have reduced to some extent compared to the past as both government and non-government groups are trying to help those women. Lily Thapa, chairperson of the Single Women's Group for Human Rights, said that their group has been running different campaigns and programs to help widowed women. However, conservative traditional beliefs and views are still deeply rooted in our society.

1.6.5 Conclusion

The study examines the social, economic, and family issues faced by widows in rural areas of Nepal. Despite improvements in traditional practices like "Sati Pratha" and the "Red for

Women" campaign, widows still face challenges such as exploitation, oppression, shame, and accusations from family and society. The study also highlights the limitations in their religious activities. Marxist feminism suggests that understanding and analyzing society based on class can help address these issues, with patriarchy and capitalist structures being blamed for the abuse and oppression faced by widows. Despite these improvements, widows continue to face significant challenges and discrimination.

Liberal feminists after 1950 advocated for restructuring socio-economic and political relations, emphasizing the need for women's freedom in profession and education. However, widows in a study area face challenges such as lack of proper education, wage differences, and patriarchal thinking. Despite theories of equal rights, women and widows still struggle to participate freely in their professions. Government and non-government groups need to take different actions to help widows, as inheritance and ancestral property are primarily controlled by men. Changing family relationships would help widows and widowers, but they will still face challenges.

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