



Psycho-Social Challenges Faced by Working Widows in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Widowhood is a significant life event that brings about various emotional, social, and economic changes for the woman, who navigates the challenges of grief, loss, and the adjustments required in her roles and responsibilities. The objective of this study was to explore socio psychological and emotional challenges faced by a working widows in Pakistan. For this purpose, a qualitative study was conducted to see how working widows faced different challenges and to analyze the social and cultural factors influence on their mental health. The sample of the study consisted of 12 working widows with age range of 35 to 59 years, who have been facing psycho-social challenges since spouse death. The data was collected through in-depth interviews based on semi-structured questions. Before collection of data a pilot study was conducted in order to polish the questionnaire. Privacy and confidentiality were maintained throughout the process. Thematic analysis was conducted to analyze the results. Participants frequently mentioned the absence of moral and emotional support in their lives. They expressed feelings of loneliness, difficulty in decision-making, and a lack of emotional outlets. Moreover, the nature of moral and emotional support they lack is primarily related to matters of children's upbringing, domestic affairs, and financial responsibilities. The research also uncovers the impact on children's mental health after losing their fathers.



Introduction

Widowhood is a term that refers to the state or condition of being a widow, which is the status of a woman whose spouse has died. When a woman's husband passed away, she becomes a widow (Ennis & Majid, 2020). It is a transitional period marked by mourning, adaptation, and often, the pursuit of rebuilding one's life and finding a new sense of purpose and identity. Widows may face unique social and economic circumstances, and their experiences of widowhood can vary based on cultural, religious, and societal factors (Peña et al., 2021).

Widowhood is a global concern with no culture, ethnic and racial group, or religion immune to the phenomenon. Literature has proven that the population of widows can be described to have reached epidemic levels globally with future projections expected to rise (The Loomba Foundation, 2015). As an example, the global proportion population of widows was around 16% in 2009 and has lately increased by 9.0% (The Loomba Foundation, 2015).

In the US, women with age are increasingly face widowhood, "about 800,000 adults in the US become widows each year" (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). Also, according to Lichtenstein and colleagues (1996) and Cherlin (2010), nearly half of all women over 65 years in the world, are widows; this is almost triple the rate of widowers. These figures point to the severity of the widow problem in the world. In addition, widowhood is an "integral loss" (Matlin, 2004; Vijay, 2010).

Moreover, the woman in our society faced a lot of problems after the death of her husband. The problems faced by the widows include many social, economic, cultural and psychological issues. The widow in our society is bounded to experience various dimensions of stress, like lack of necessary emotional support and financial assistance at an age when her earning power is gradually on the decline. In addition to the psychological problems, the survey conducted by us also highlighted the health problems of the widows. About 39 percent of the elderly widows suffered from chronic health problems in this area. The percentage of physical immobility due to chronic illness and old age was found to be consistently higher for women than men in all states of the community.

Highlights of the Prevalence of Widowhood in Pakistan

All societies of the world consist of the population of ageing people, including widows (Begum, 2012; Nawaz, Maann, Akhter & Ashraf, 2012). Generally, the population of women is higher due to their higher life expectancy than men (Ehiemua, 2014). In most countries of the world women outnumber the men widows (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015). In the context of Pakistani society 2017, the average life expectancy is higher for women i.e., 68.2 years for women, while 65.8 years for male, (Government of Pakistan, 2017). As a result, widows constitute 8%, while widowers constitute 3% of population in Pakistan (Government of Pakistan, 2014). In 2012-13, the ratio of widowhood was 8.45%. Among the provinces, the highest ratio of widows exists in Sindh province, where they constitute 8.70% of the total female population. After Sindh, Punjab is the second province having 8.64% population of widows, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with 7.83%, Baluchistan with 6.48% widows' population (Sheikh, 2017). In Pakistani society, not only the population of elderly widows is increasing, but the old age supporting culture is also on decline, which intensify their economic vulnerability. The widows, on account of aging, face more challenges than men. Mostly, the widows face inequality, discrimination, poverty and abuse. Due to increasing population of widow women and inequalities as well as discrimination, old age is now viewed from the feminine perspective. This phenomenon is known as the feminization of aging. Among the problems of widows, social hardships occupy a central position.

Globally out of 245 million widows, 115 million live in extreme poverty (Widows rights international, 2010). Women, at their old age, are poorer than men particularly when women live without a partner as widowed, divorced/separated or never married (UNO, 2015; Sherlock, Corso & Minicuci, 2015). Holden and Kuo (1996) argued that men are supposed to be the breadwinner of the household, while women, usually, lack the earning experience and skills. After widowhood many widows are, usually, unable to participate in income generating activities, therefore, face poverty. The socio impact of widowhood varies from bad to worst depending on the socio-economic status of the family (Nnodim, Albert & Isife, 2012).

Likewise global scenario, in Pakistani Pakhtun society, the household headship responsibility is usually managed by a male family member. However, when a woman becomes a widow, get divorce, separate or when the husband has migrated in search of employment, she has to shoulder the house management responsibility (Hasan, 2010; Javed & Asif, 2011). Female household headship is viewed as challenging job particularly for elderly widows because it brings personal and familial problems for women (Hossain & Huda, 1995). The major issue of female household headship is economic vulnerability as social challenge. For financial management of the house, widows have to participate in income generating activities (Restrepo, 2002). In developing countries, such as Pakistan, where the concept of social security and pensions is not developed, and the traditional family network has broken down, widows have few options of economic engagements. In some conditions, widows have to involve in the most exploitative and unregulated areas of informal sector labor. In addition, the possible employment opportunities, for elderly widows, may be domestic labor, and sending children to work as domestic servants or sacrificing them to early marriages (UNO, 2000; Nnodim, Albert, & Isife, 2012). Changing cultural values of Pakistani society also aggravated widowhood problems. Until recently, aging and widowhood was not an issue of the Pakistani society.

In Pakistan, most of women live below the poverty line because Pakistan is a developing country having low per capita income. Due to high inflation rate, unemployment, low literacy, cultural restrictions, patriarchal structure of the society, vulnerable poor including elderly widows are confronted with poverty (Tarar & Pulla, 2014). In addition, the lack of old age pension schemes, deprivation of widows from property inheritance, economic dependence on children, weak employment, financial background of deceased

husband and disintegration of joint family system are considered responsible for widows' mental and social problems in Pakistan (Arif & Farooq, 2012).

Challenges

Psychosocial experiences refer to the dynamic relationships between the psychological and social dimension of a person, where the one influences the other. The psychological dimension includes the internal, emotional and thought processes of a person – his or her feelings and reactions. The social dimension includes relationships, family and community networks, social values and cultural practices (Bjornstad, 2009). These experiences are thus grouped into socio-cultural, health, economical, and psychological, and are discussed in their direct relation to widows.

Psycho-social issues

Women are unlikely to have title deeds in their name. This means that they are blocked from accessing any form of credit when land is required as collateral. Financial challenges affect one's psycho-social situation. However, the studies do not address this effect.

Such as in Kenya, the link of widows to land and to availability of credit, is further discussed by Kimani and Maina (2010), "women's lack of agricultural credit considerably lowers their productive capacity, thus adding on to their low levels of literacy". This situation is further aggravated by customary practices that among other issues, dictate that a married woman does not own property during marriage. The practice is that a woman's property, whether acquired before or after marriage, is in the sole control and disposition of her husband. This position is challenged by the Kenya Human Rights Commission (1998), and improves gradually through the new constitution (Constitution of Kenya, 2010; Kenya Land Alliance, 2006). The subordination of women undermines their social position and adversely affects their economic power; it only enhances discrimination and inequality. This in turn has implications on per capita income and development at large while it perpetuates inequalities between men and women.

Socio-cultural challenges

Socio-cultural issues include the silent suffering and grieving of widows and the dehumanizing rituals such as, gender imbalance, lack of economic independence, problems in remarriage and personal autonomy, loss of status, lack of access to useful resources and social support Maseno (2014).

Socioeconomic challenges

By considering the global example, Olantunji (2013), discussed the socio-political as well as socio-economic challenges that widows go through in West Africa. She discussed the issues on patriarchal socio-economic systems that incorporate ethnic discrimination, legal inequalities, and educational imbalances. These factors lead to unequal representation in public, political and non-political institutions, and in other places of representation (the media for instance), translating into widow unemployment and poverty. Consequently, widows are mistreated as second-class citizens or as inferior to their male counterparts.

The present study is a qualitative investigation intending to explore the socio-psychological and emotional journey of widows whose spouses had died. The purpose of this study is analyzing various dimensions of socio-psychological and emotional problems faced by widows and their immediate effects on their quality of life.

Objectives

- To explore socio-psychological and emotional challenges faced by a widow after her husband's death.
- To find out the socio and cultural factors that influence her mental health.
- To find out and analyze the social issues of working widows faced in Pakistani society.

Literature review

In developing countries like Pakistan, working widowed often faced social problems and simultaneous psychological and emotional challenges over the course of their lives. These problems primarily manifested themselves as psychological issues like stress, anxiety, depression and tension. whereas marginalization, alienation, abuse, unfair judgments, subjugation, deprivation, discrimination, seclusion and overburden are the forms of social issues. The current research assessed the extent of emotional hardships such as reduced social interaction, heightened stress levels and psychological issues like loneliness, anxiety and anger among women have become widows (Ahmad et al., 2020).

The study briefed how widows in Pakistan faced a far greater burden of psychological complications like depression, anxiety and stress compared to married women. Widows also experienced social marginalization and are excluded from social spheres like religious festivals, social events, family programs and much more due to superstitious beliefs associating them with bad luck or fate. The vulnerability of widows, stemming from a lack of psychological support from their deceased spouses, puts them at risk of harassment and sexual assaults. Furthermore, rigid cultural norms based on patriarchal values contribute to

widows' deprivation of housing, clothing and food, negatively impacting their psychological wellbeing. In order to address these challenges, widows should be supported with emotional and psychological security through social acceptance, remarriage and counseling. It is necessary to dispel the loneliness experienced by widows by offering emotional and psychological support through social exclusion. Engaging in social activities can help widows avoid prolonged feelings of stress and sorrow (Ahmad et al., 2020).

Viertio et al., (2021) highlighted the challenges faced by elderly widow as in Pakistan society leading to economic vulnerability. The aging posed greater problems on elderly widows compared to elderly men. Inequality, discrimination, social marginalization, poverty and abuse are ever existing problems faced by these widows. This process is referred to as feminization of aging. Economic hardships take over central position among problems experienced by elderly widows in Pakistan, Globally, a significant number of widows, including a considerable proportion of Pakistan live in extreme poverty. The societal expectation of men as breadwinners often results in women lacking the necessary experience and skills for earning a livelihood. Widowhood further complicated the situation, as many elderly widows are unable to engage in income generating activities leading to financial struggles. The economic impact of widowhood varies depending on the economic statuses of families.

In Pakhtun society, male family members typically assumed household headship responsibilities. However, when a woman became a widow, experienced divorce or separation, or her husband migrated in search of employment, she forced to handle the burdens of household. Female domestic headship, particularly for elderly widows, presents multiple challenges to related to personal and domestic life, stemming from economic vulnerability. Widows often have to participate in income-generating activities to manage the financial aspects of the household. Furthermore, some widows may have restricted opportunities in employment sector thus resorting to sending their children to work at an early age (Viertio et al., 2021).

The research "Socio-Psychological Consequences of Spouse's Death on Widows of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa" revealed that absence of a spouse is deeply felt as a deficiency that cannot be substituted by any other relationship. Women, especially in Pakistan, who are widowed are particularly vulnerable experiencing psychological problems, often resulting from various socio-cultural factors that give rise to adjustment problems. This study explained that widows often developed insecure attachments with their in-laws, friends, and other individuals following the death of their spouse. Consequently, they came across significant challenges in maintaining high quality relationships and faced numerous adjustment difficulties. Interestingly, despite of the prevalence of relationship difficulties among widows, their pattern of social interaction did not seem to significantly impact their overall life satisfaction. Majority of the cases reported high scores for their overall satisfaction in life. However, the widows expressed feelings of emotional damage, insecurity, fear and the profound impact of losing an important relationship in life (Chitrani & Anwar, 2013).

Khan et al., (2016) discussed that working widows encounter multiple psychological and social issues due to societal resistance both within and outside their homes. The dual responsibilities of being both the mothers as well as the housekeepers along their professional careers further annihilate the possible peaceful life. The research found out that the respondents faced various social and psychological problems attributed to their dual role. Social disapproval, resistance at home and workplace and demanding natures of their jobs inflict psycho social issues of the lives of working women. Some of the participants expressed their desire for dedicating more time to the families or considering shifting to full time motherhood or housewife roles. However, there are variations in aspirations as some preferred to cling to their working statuses. In short, working women, particularly the mothers of young kids and academics face multifarious socio psychological problems.

Psychological distress is a prevalent issue especially in working men and women, the study highlighted that nearly 11% of women in the working population experienced psychological worries. Family to work conflict was found to be more strongly associated with psychological distress than work to family conflict, contrary to previous findings. Women in particular reported to have psychological distress after having to ignore family related or domestic responsibilities due to workload. Difficulty in concentration on work was strongly linked with psychological burden, potentially indicating complicated family related challenges (Khan et al., 2016).

Method

Research Design

The research was qualitative in nature.

Sample

The interviews were conducted with 12 working widows with age range 35 to 59 who have been widowed since at least 5 to 15 years.

Inclusion Criteria

Women with age range of 35-59 who have been widowed since 5 to 15 years and having younger children were included.

Exclusion Criteria

Women with age of above 60 who have been recently widowed as well as with no children were excluded.

Ethical Consideration

Complete permission and consent of the participants have been recorded before conducting the interviews. The main objective and purpose of this study will be explained to the participants and assure them that their personal information will be confidential.

Demographics Profile of Widows

Participants	Age (in Years)	Work category	Widows' children
Participant 1	35	Teacher	3
Participant 2	35	Teacher	2
Participant 3	42	School maid	3
Participant 4	37	Private job	4
Participant 5	39	Private job	4
Participant 6	50	Govt lecturer	6
Participant 7	55	Govt hostel maid	6
Participant 8	43	Nurse at Shalimar hospital	1
Participant 9	59	Teacher	3
Participant 10	40	Office job	3
Participant 11	36	Office job	2
Participant 12	36	Private sector officer	2

In-depth interview

Data was collected through semi-structured questions based on in-depth interviews.

Procedure

Permission to conduct this research obtained from Lahore college for women university before collecting data. Pilot study was conducted before collecting data. Interviews were conducted through proper interview protocol. A recording device was used for recording all the interviews. The interviews were conducted after their consent. Informed consent was a central principle of research ethics that mainly focuses on the rights of individuals. All the participants were made assured that their privacy and relative information would not be disclosed to any third person and also the purpose of the study. They were informed about the interview's date and time before 2 days and the interviews were taken in their convenient language.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis of the data was recorded over the course of research.

Results

After seeking permission from the department and the consent of interviewees, the research data was collected and transcribed to fetch important facts and frame a consequent analysis which is also called the thematic analysis technique. In this research, our main focus was to explore the psycho-social challenges faced by working widows in Pakistan. Moreover, the research explored how these widows cope with the persistent challenges and thus move on in their daily course of life. All the interviews were analyzed discreetly.

The thematic analysis is based on the main, connecting, and emerging themes.

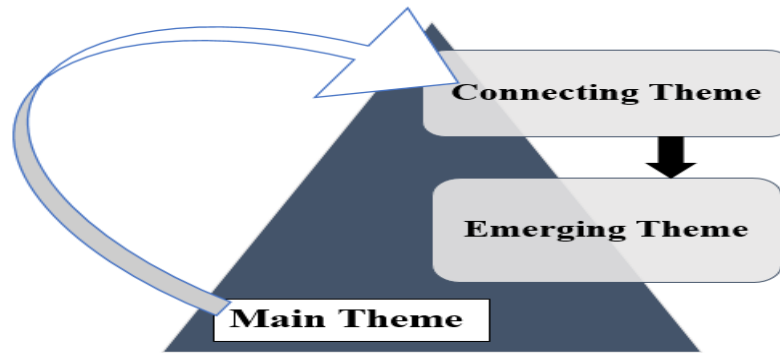


Figure 1: Thematic Analysis

Participants were encoded (Table. 1) to interpret the responses along with the confidentiality of participants. Before the interview, the consent was approved. A total of 12 interviews with female widow were taken.

Table 1: Coding of Participants

P1	P4	P7	P10
P2	P5	P8	P11
P3	P6	P9	P12

Table 2: Tabular Summary of thematic analysis of psychosocial challenges faced by working widows in Pakistan that consisted of the Main theme, and connecting theme, generated by each participant after the interview.

Main Theme	Connecting Theme
Socio-psychological and emotional challenges	Lack of moral support
	Lack of emotional support
	Economic burden
	Deteriorating child mental health
Mental health	Cultural Pressure
	Societal Judgments
	Burden
Social Issues	Family support
	Behavior
	Economic stability
	Upbringing of Children
	Career

Lack of Moral and Emotional Support

The research finds out repetitively that the clients frequently mentioned the absence of moral and emotional support in their lives after the death of their husbands. **“Routine chores are same, but moral support is absent. Earlier we would solve everything by discussing, now my responsibilities have increased. So, in this view, I often think I have to take all decisions alone.” (P5).** In another instance, a

widow told that **“There is obviously an absence of moral support, in case of children etc.” (P4)**. Another case sheds light on lack of support and an absence of friend like relation in widow’s life: **“When I am free there is no one for sharing, my husband was my best friend. I miss him dearly in a lot of cases.” (P12)**. The interviews have categorically implied that no matter the background and situation of the widow, almost every individual has noticed or felt the absence of moral and emotional support that was present in their partner’s lives.

The study explored that the nature of moral and emotional support that was absent in the lives of these widows was primarily related to the matters of children, their upbringing and domestic and financial affairs. **“Life before his death was so good. He never said anything. This life is very hard. Neither can a person wear good nor rest well.” (P10)**. So there is an apparent emotional collapse on the client’s side as they have no immediate relation to come out for their support through thick and thin and to guard their psychology and emotional stability against various issues. The absence of marriage partner has been viewed as one of the most stressing problems in an individual’s life. One client shares her plight in words **“They supported me through sickness and financially and morally as well. But the absence of a person cannot be filled by anyone, neither money nor siblings. It is something that only I or my kids can feel. (P7)**. A consistent and obvious lack of moral support seems to make life for these widows much harder to carry.

Financial burden

On other hand one client who had been earning much earlier and was also once the sole bread winner of her family found it much easier to cope with the challenges post her husband’s death. She faced much lesser complication and psycho social challenges that are usually associated with a widow’s life especially if she bears children, The client tells: **“Since I have been teaching, of O levels too before marriage, then ... my husband had loss in business then again, I had to struggle, taught part time in private schools so as such I did not feel much difference because I was earning before my marriage as well. Then a time came, when his business went zero and I had to bear all expenditure.” (P10)**. This particular interview helped explored the necessity of woman’s financial independence during life of the partner.

Apart from this independence, majority of widows were seen demoralized owing to the financial strain being put on them after their husbands’ demise. **“See, where I could visit my parents nearly 4 times in a week now, I get to visit once in six months, things have gotten sold too like car etc., so you need transport as well that again demands money...” (P8)**. the interview unveils how the financial burden just does not come in form of daily feed or children’s education but also in form of transport and travelling etc. The interview further revealed how the client had sold out all the major things at home to be able to deal with immediate financial crisis.

Deteriorating Child Mental Health

Another theme explored in the challenges faced by widows is their children’s deteriorating mental health or psychology. Many of the clients were seen discussing about how their children have faced and continue to face multitudinous psychological issues in absence of their father who have been a continuous support and shield for the children in their lifetime. **“The kind of confidence children have in their father’s presence diminishes. They remain double minded about everything.” (P1)**. The interview sheds light on the aspects of low self-esteem, shattered confidence and indecision that are often accompanied with loneliness among children after the loss of their father. Fatherly figure is supposed to boost children’s confidence yet guiding them through every decision of their life. The sudden vanishing of father from children’s lives often leaves them on crossroads. Another one adds: **“Obviously kids get upset, the shadow of their father is no more over the head, they become agitated at small things and get depressed “(P8)**. One widow describes it in words like: **“A father’s love is a father’ love. My husband was very caring towards our kids, so they frequently miss him.” (P5)**

Children expect their parents to guard them against harshness of the world and love them unconditionally. With the death of a parent, the child is not only devoid of an unconditional and uncompromised love and affection, but is also suddenly exposed to bitter realities and difficulties of life. **“I try a lot to help them to not miss that much, but they keep reminding of how their father was like. I try my best to fill the void and not let them feel his absence, but still, they miss him. They were really young when he died. My younger was nearly 7-8 years old.” (P5)**

Cultural Pressure

Another pressing theme being emphasized in the interviews and subsequently covered in the research is the cultural restrictions and pressure that further tighten the noose around the widows. One interview explains the type of pressure a widow comes across after her husband’s demise. **“The biggest issue is that my marriage was only of 4 years when he died, so biggest pressure was for second marriage. Everyone forced me for that.” (P11)**. The pressure for another marriage as a compulsory act to be able to sustain

widow's own and her children's lives is seen to be normal in context of Pakistan. The idea of second marriage being enforced can be highly damaging for psychological wellbeing of both the widow and her children amid the immediate chaos that follow after the death of the husband. The client termed the experience as the "biggest issue" she faced after her husband's death. This fact amply justifies how cultural pressure only worsens a widow's life experience and can potentially stop her from achieving a normal life again for herself and her children after a traumatic experience of a loss of the partner.

Culturally, many widows experienced straining of relations that often comes with the death of their husbands. One client recounted similar loss of empathy and understanding from her family. To add to the misery, there is a persistent pressure on widows to live rest of their lives in mourning and sorrowful phase. Any attempt at moving on emotionally or at being fanciful or being happy on the outlook is severely discouraged. *"Every kind of relation suffers certain strain. They start criticizing everything; don't do this or that, don't wear good clothes, don't go here and there."* (P1). The research explored the bitter side of relatives often taking them over and them becoming an added hurdle and issue for the widow instead of being a source of relief and peace for her.

Societal Judgments

The research found out another associated social theme in form of "societal judgments" through the interviews of widows in Pakistan. The society tends to build an array of judgments that are continuously encountered by widows and their children as testified in the interviews. Many clients have seemed to build a comparison of their life before and after their husband's death and the majority have complained about the issues, they faced that propagated just through society's unhelpful and scornful attitude in forms of blatant judgments and queries. One widow recount: *"Life before his death was so good. He never said anything. This life is very hard. Neither can a person wear good nor rest well. When you arrive from outside even then no one leaves you at peace, neither family nor outsiders."* (P10). The case revealed the unnecessary, biased and problematic attitude of unconcerned people passing on wrong judgments about the client's life without taking into account the problems she has to deal with every day for sake of her family. Even a simple act of wearing good, which should rather be encouraged is seemed as flamboyant and morally bankrupt through societal gaze. The pressure and stress is often multiplied when the people at home also participate in the practice further demoralizing and stressing the single working women.

Another kind of pressure and societal judgment being faced by widows was for the grooming and lifestyle of their children. If the widows are working hard to provide a good lifestyle to their children, the children will again be questioned as being too liberal regarding cultural norms and being out of male's restrictive gaze that essentially guides children, especially daughters to be on the straight path. One client shares such sort of experience in her interview like: *"Now people can raise questions that there is no male at home and therefore children have become too independent. Every step has to be taken very discreetly else people judge freedom negatively. So, we take a lot of care regarding that and do everything carefully."* (P6)

Even worse is the situation of widows who are criticized by society for having role in their husband's death. This usually implies their actions or sometimes intent, none of which are even proven or being substantiated with any concrete evidence but rather a foul play of words to further suppress the mourning. One client had seemed to burst into tears while narrating similar tragedy with her life who has been listening similar accusation by her own brother-in-law throughout till date. *"My brother-in-law. He always claims that it was because of me, that I said something that caused his death. I still hear that."* (P10).

Discussion

The present qualitative research has been conducted in order to explore the psycho socio challenges faced by working widows in Pakistan. The similar findings of this research shed light on several important issues faced by widows in Pakistan, with significant implications for their well-being as well as the well-being of their children. One of the key themes that emerged from the interviews was the lack of moral and emotional support experienced by widows after the death of their husbands. The participants consistently expressed the absence of support and the emotional collapse they felt without their partner's presence. This lack of support was particularly evident in matters related to children, upbringing, and domestic and financial affairs. The participants emphasized how their husbands provided not only financial support but also moral guidance and emotional stability, which were sorely missed after their husband's deaths (Ding, 2021)

Similarly, it was seen in findings that aligned with previous studies that highlighted the crucial role of spousal support in a widow's life. Research has shown that the loss of a spouse can lead to a significant decrease in emotional well-being and an increased risk of depression and anxiety (Carr, 2018). Widows often rely on their spouses for emotional support, companionship, and decision-making, and the absence of these sources of support can have a profound impact on their psychological and emotional state.

Furthermore, this study revealed that the situation for widows in Pakistan is particularly challenging

due to the lack of assistance from the government and the prevailing economic and social difficulties faced by the majority of the population. Women in Pakistan, already marginalized in many areas, face even harsher circumstances after becoming widows. Many widows struggle to fully support their children due to limited financial resources and a lack of education to address their moral problems effectively. This combination of economic strain and societal limitations exacerbates the difficulties faced by widows and contributes to their compromised quality of life.

The similar study related to the economic burden emerged as another significant challenge faced by widows in Pakistan. Many of the participants had little or no prior experience in bearing the financial responsibilities of the family, as it was traditionally the role of men to provide for the household. The sudden loss of their husbands left these widows solely responsible for not only themselves but also their children. This financial strain was evident in various aspects, including daily expenses, children's education, and transportation. The participants had to sell valuable assets and struggle to make ends meet, often living below the poverty line (Nawaz, 2021).

Similar findings reported in previous research on widows' economic challenges. Numerous studies shown that widows often experience a decline in their socioeconomic status and face financial hardships due to the loss of their spouse's income and the absence of social support systems (Latham, 2018). This economic vulnerability is further exacerbated in developing countries like Pakistan, where unemployment, inflation, and cultural restrictions limit widows' access to resources and financial independence.

The present study extracted to the detrimental impact of widowhood on the psychological well-being of the widows' children. The participants reported that their children experienced various psychological issues, such as low self-esteem, shattered confidence, indecision, and depression, following the loss of their fathers. The absence of a father figure, who typically provides support, guidance, and unconditional love, leaves children feeling vulnerable and uncertain. They struggled with the sudden exposure to harsh realities and the challenges of life without the presence of their father (Ali, 2023)

These findings are consistent with existing literature on the impact of parental loss on children's mental health. Research has shown that the loss of a parent can have profound and lasting effects on children's psychological well-being, leading to increased emotional distress, behavioral problems, and academic difficulties (Bowlby, 1980). Children rely on their parents for emotional support and protection, and the loss of a parent disrupts this fundamental source of security and stability.

Moreover, in this study related to cultural restrictions and pressures, that have been faced by widows in Pakistan add an additional layer of challenges to their already difficult circumstances. The participants described how societal norms and expectations compelled them to consider remarriage as a means to sustain their own and their children's lives. The pressure for remarriage can be highly distressing for widows and their children, particularly in the immediate aftermath of their husband's death. This cultural pressure can hinder their ability to heal and move forward, further prolonging their grief and impeding their chances of achieving a sense of normalcy (Alordiah, 2022)

The research also related to that is strained relationships with relatives and societal judgments as significant challenge faced by widows. Participants expressed the loss of empathy and understanding from their families and the societal disapproval they encountered. Widows were subjected to judgments and criticism regarding their lifestyle choices, appearance, and actions. Society's unhelpful and scornful attitude compounded their challenges, with even simple acts of self-expression and happiness being discouraged. These judgments and societal pressures added to the widows' stress and contributed to their feelings of isolation and frustration.

Similarly, this study shows the cultural and societal pressures faced by widows that have been documented in previous research. Studies have shown that widows often encounter societal stigmatization, prejudice, and stereotypes, which further marginalize them and impede their social integration (Fedorowicz, 2016). The disapproval and judgments imposed by society can significantly affect widows' mental well-being and their ability to navigate their lives post-loss.

Conclusion

The present research elaborated multifaceted challenges that have been faced by widows in Pakistan, including the lack of moral and emotional support, the economic burden, the deteriorating psychological well-being of their children, cultural pressures, and societal judgments. These findings resonate with previous studies conducted in various cultural contexts, emphasizing the universal struggles experienced by widows after the loss of their husbands. Understanding and addressing these challenges are crucial for developing interventions and support systems that can help widows and their children cope with their grief, rebuild their lives, and achieve overall well-being. Further research and collaborative efforts are needed to advocate for policy changes and social reforms that can alleviate the burdens faced by widows and provide

them with the support and resources necessary to navigate their post-loss journey effectively.

Limitations

Limitations of the present study are:

1. Researcher was not able to include more participants in this study.
2. This study was focused only on those widows who have younger children.

Suggestions

1. To provide free education facilities to the children of Widows.
2. To provide free medical facilities to widows and their Children.
3. Further research and collaborative efforts should be needed to advocate for policy changes and social reforms that can alleviate the burdens faced by widows and provide them with the support and resources necessary to navigate their post-loss journey effectively.

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