#### Widows: Causes and Effects

A presentation on International Widows Day, June 23, 2011, at the **United Nations** 

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Founded in 1987, IWPR is the leading think tank in the U.S. focusing on policy issues affecting women, with particular attention to employment, education and economic change; democracy and society; poverty, welfare and income security; work and family; and health and safety. It works in affiliation with the women's studies and public policy programs at the George Washington University.



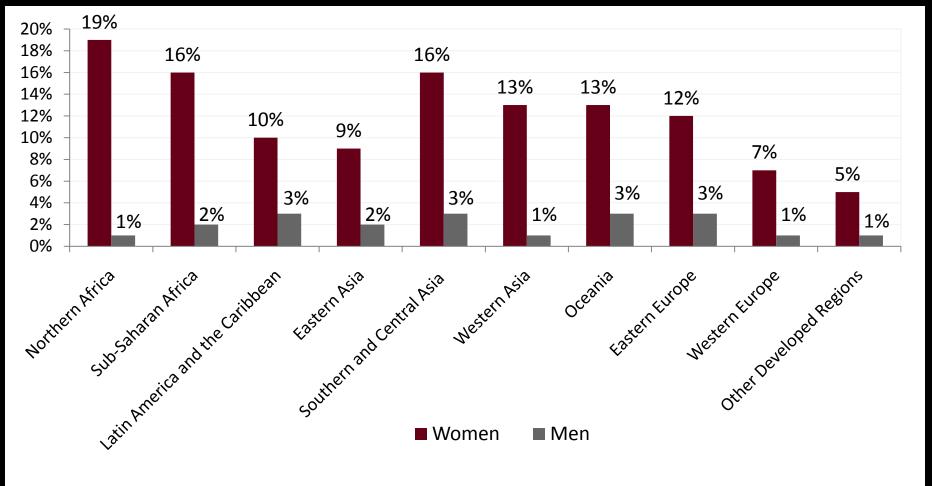
#### Widows Around the World

- Widowhood is primarily a problem of women
- 245 million widows with 65 million minor children worldwide (Loomba Foundation)
- Widows are disadvantaged everywhere
- Disadvantages are severe in some regions where widowhood can be lifelong and widows are often disenfranchised



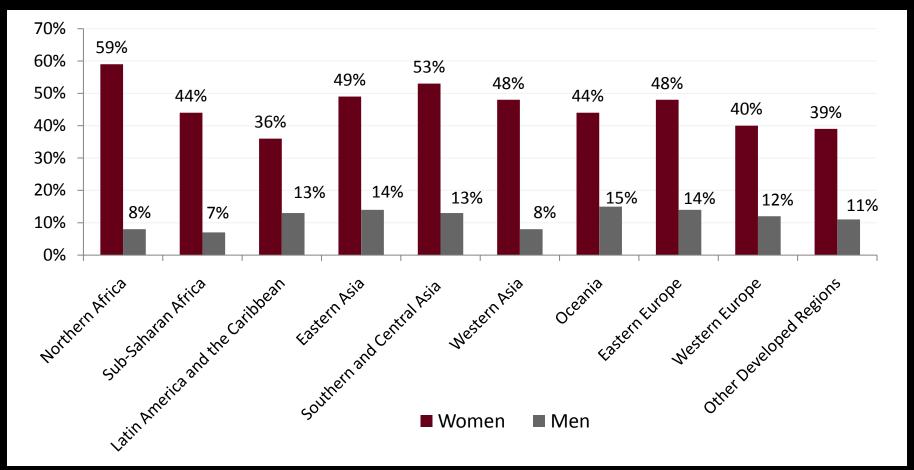


# Percentage of those Aged 45-59 who are Widowed, 1985-1997



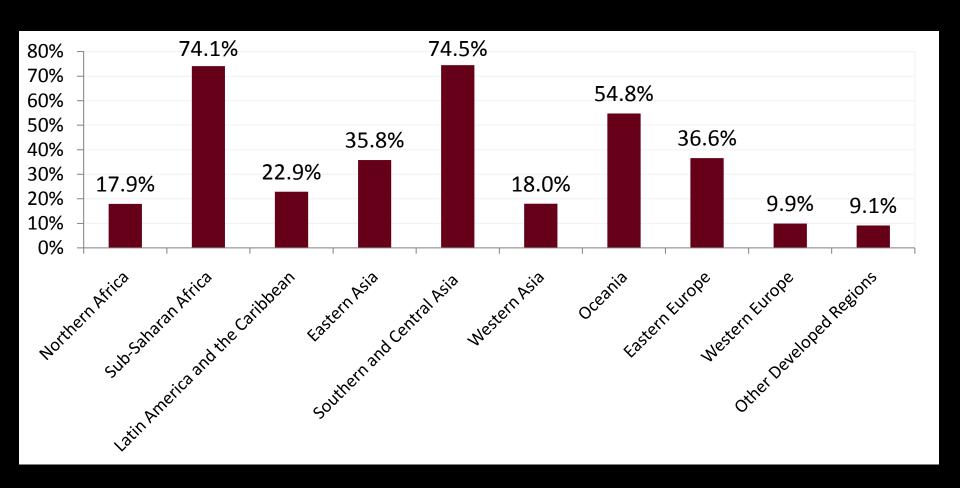


# Percentage of those Aged 60 + who are Widowed, 1985-1997





# Percentage of Widows Living in Poverty, 2010



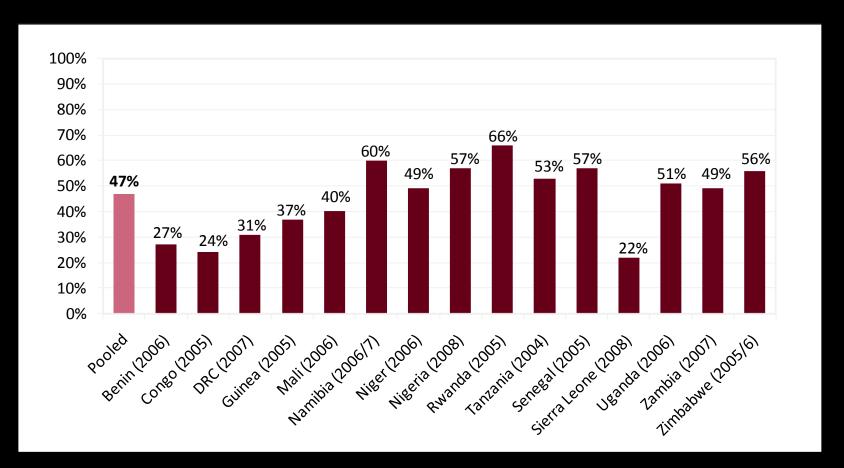


## Causes of Widowhood and of Economic Disadvantage in Widowhood

- War, genocide, terrorism
- Disease (especially HIV/AIDS, TB, and Malaria)
- Work Accidents
- Younger age of girls/women at marriage
- Widows may not inherit husband's property and may be run off by other family members
- Traditional proscriptions on employment and remarriage, or forced marriage to relative of the deceased
- Female longevity



### Widows Reporting Inheriting Any Assets in 15 African Countries

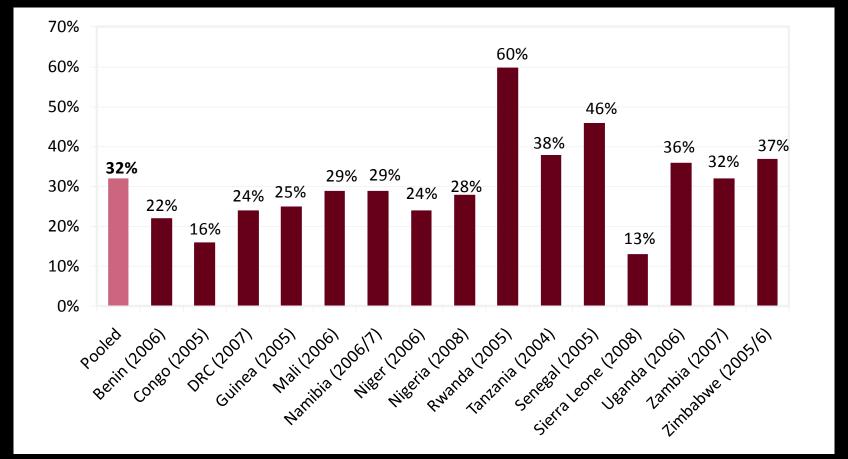


Note: Mean values are weighted using nationally-representative weights among widows ages 15-49.

Source: Cross country DHS in: Amber Peterman (2010) Widowhood and Asset Inheritance in Sub-Saharan Africa: Empirical Evidence from 15 Countries.



# Widows/Widow's Children Inheriting the Majority of Assets

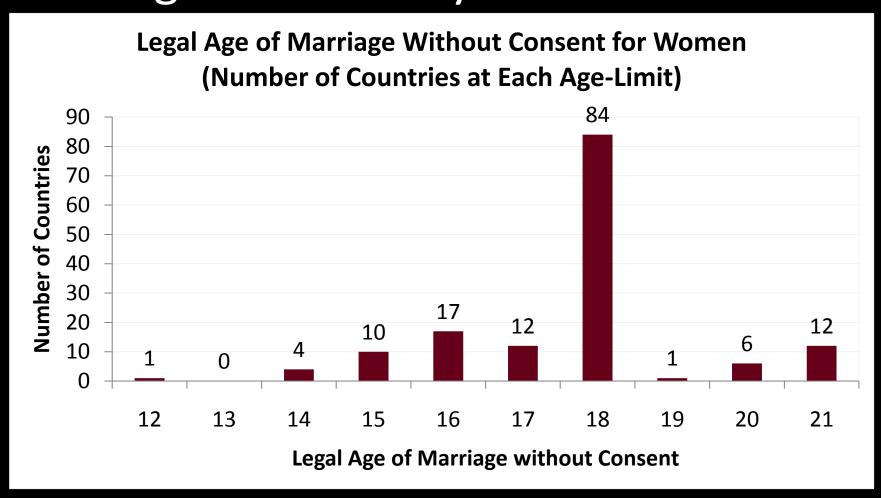


Note: In most cases, the majority of the assets go to the husband's family, other wife, or other persons, or the husband had no property. Mean values are weighted using nationally-representative weights among widows ages 15-49.

Source: Cross country DHS in: Amber Peterman (2010) Widowhood and Asset Inheritance in Sub-Saharan Africa: Empirical Evidence from 15 Countries.

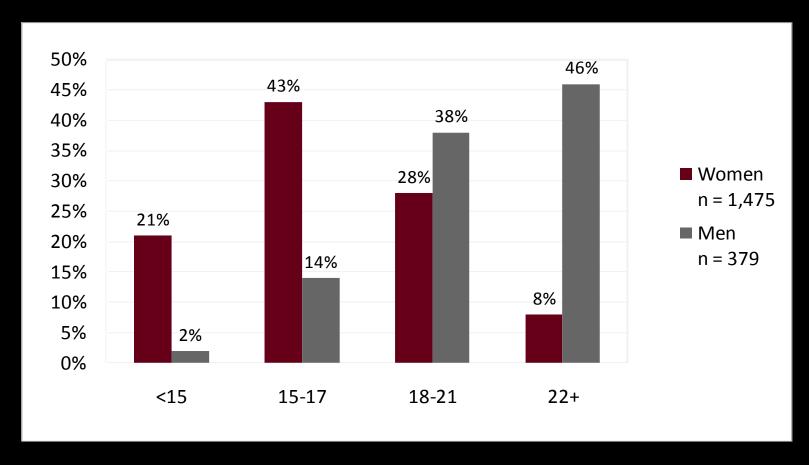


## In Most Countries, Women Must be at Least Age 18 to Marry Without Consent





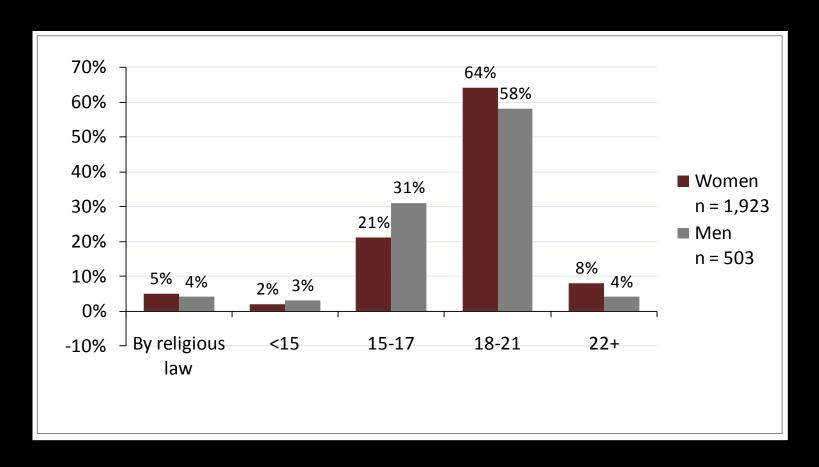
# Yemen: Actual Age of First Marriage, 2010



Source: International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR). 2011. The Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) Project. Focus on Yemen: Opinions on Early Marriage and Gender Quotas - Topic Brief.



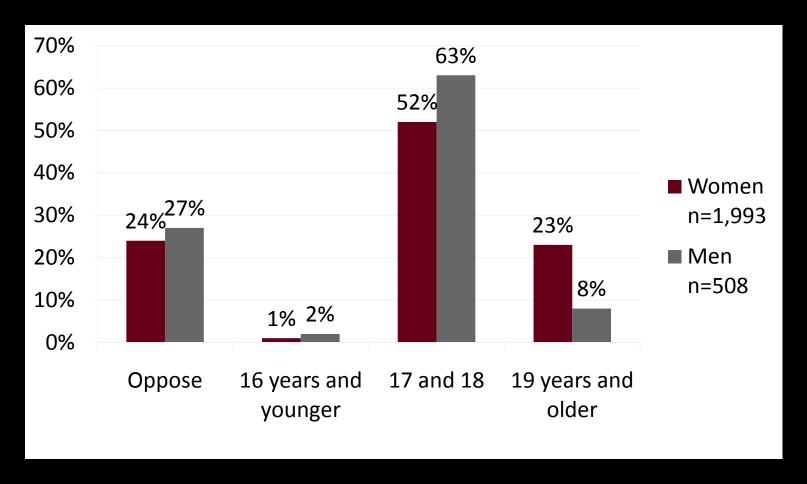
### Yemen: Minimum Acceptable Age of Marriage for Females (According to Women and Men)



Source: International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR). 2011. The Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) Project. Focus on Yemen: Opinions on Early Marriage and Gender Quotas - Topic Brief.



### Yemen: Support for Legislation to Establish a Minimum Marriage Age for Girls; Most Say at Least Age 17



Note: The 65 "Don't Know/No Response " observations were excluded from the sample (less than three percent). Source: International Foundation for Electoral Systems and The Institute for Women's Policy Research. 2011. The Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) Project. Focus on Yemen: Opinions on Early Marriage and Gender Quotas - Topic Brief.



### Remedies

- Education, education, education
- Establish property rights for survivors
- Establish rights to employment and selfemployment (access to credit)
- Eliminate marriage of girls; reduce age differences
- Improve the public safety net



#### Resources

- Chen, Martha A. 2000. Perpetual Mourning: Widowhood in Rural India. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Dutt, Vijay. 2010. Invisible Forgotten Sufferers: The Plight of Widows Around the World. New Delhi: Konark Publishers Pvt Ltd.
- Hartmann, Heidi, Jeff Hayes, and Robert Drago. 2011. Social Security: Especially Vital to Women and People of Color, Men Increasingly Reliant. Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research. <a href="http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/social-security-especially-vital-to-women-and-people-of-color-men-increasingly-reliant">http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/social-security-especially-vital-to-women-and-people-of-color-men-increasingly-reliant</a> (Accessed August 19, 2011).
- International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR). 2011. Focus on Yemen: Opinions on Early Marriage and Gender Quotas Topic Brief. <a href="http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/focus-on-yemen-opinions-on-early-marriage-and-gender-quotas">http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/focus-on-yemen-opinions-on-early-marriage-and-gender-quotas</a> (Accessed August 19, 2011).
- Peterman, Amber. 2010. Widowhood and Asset Inheritance in Sub-Saharan Africa: Empirical Evidence from 15 Countries. Paper presented at conference, Inheritance and the Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty. Roundtable of the Chronic Poverty Research Center and the Overseas Development Institute.
- United Nations. 2001. *The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics*. New York: United Nations Publications.
- United Nations Statistics Division. 2008. "Gender Info 2007."
  <a href="http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/genderinfo/default.htm">http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/genderinfo/default.htm</a> (Accessed June 22, 2011).