Widows: Causes and Effects


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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

Other Developed Regions: Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, and US.
Percentage of those Aged 60+ who are Widowed, 1985-1997

Other Developed Regions: Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, and US.
Percentage of Widows Living in Poverty, 2010

- Northern Africa: 17.9%
- Sub-Saharan Africa: 74.1%
- Latin America and the Caribbean: 22.9%
- Eastern and Central Asia: 35.8%
- Western Asia: 18.0%
- Oceania: 54.8%
- Eastern Europe: 36.6%
- Western Europe: 9.9%
- Other Developed Regions: 9.1%

Other Developed Regions: Advanced East Asia, Anglo Pacific and North America.

Source: Dutt, Vijay. Invisible Forgotten Sufferers: The Plight of Widows Around the World. Table 2.1.
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.
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.

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

![Bar chart showing the legal age of marriage without consent for women in different countries. The chart indicates that 84 countries have a legal age of 18, 12 have a legal age of 17, and so on.]

Yemen: Actual Age of First Marriage, 2010

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

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).
Remedies

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


