

# **A Study on Psychological Aspects of Widow and Their Societal Position**

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**Abstract:** *A widow is a woman whose spouse has died and has not remarried. It signifies the legal and social status of a woman who has experienced the loss of her husband. Widows often face unique challenges and adjustments as they navigate life without their spouse, including emotional grief, financial changes, and social transitions. The experience of widowhood is a significant life event that brings about a range of psychological and social changes for individuals. When a person loses their spouse, they not only face the emotional impact of grief and loss but also navigate the complex societal position assigned to widows. The psychological aspects of widowhood and the societal position of widows are linked, as the psychological well-being of widows is influenced by societal norms, cultural beliefs, and social support systems. The research method followed is descriptive research. The data is collected through a questionnaire and a sample size is 200. Convenience sampling method is adopted in the study to collect the data. The samples were collected from Egmore and through an online survey around Chennai. The independent variables are gender, age, educational qualification, occupation and place of residence of the respondents. The dependent variables are can a widow remarry after the death of her spouse, is the widow treated well in the family as well as in the society and the major psychological sufferings of widowhood. This research aims to delve into the psychological aspects of widowhood and their societal position, seeking to deepen our understanding of the unique challenges faced by widows and the contextual factors that shape their experiences. By examining the psychological processes of grief, identity transformation, and coping, alongside the societal factors of stigma, social support, and economic opportunities, we can gain insights into how widows navigate their psychological journey and societal roles.*

**Keywords:** *Psychology, Widow, Challenges, Adjustments, Societal position, Support system, Spouse, Cultural beliefs, Sufferings*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

A widow is a woman whose spouse has died and has not remarried. The term specifically refers to a woman whose husband has passed away, leaving her without her marital partner. It signifies the legal and social status of a woman who has experienced the loss of her husband. Widows often face unique challenges and adjustments as they navigate life without their spouse, including emotional grief, financial changes, and social transitions. Widows often experience intense grief, and societal expectations may prevent them from seeking timely emotional support. When a person loses their spouse, they not only face the emotional impact of grief and loss but also navigate the complex societal position assigned to widows. The psychological aspects of widowhood and the societal position of widows are intertwined, as the psychological well-being of widows is influenced by societal norms, cultural beliefs, and social support systems. The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007: This legislation ensures the protection of the rights and welfare of elderly parents, including widows. It provides provisions for maintenance, support, and healthcare for senior citizens, including widows who may require psychological and emotional support. Widows are at increased risk of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and even post-traumatic stress, especially if the husband's death was sudden or traumatic. Many widows experience a crisis of identity, particularly in cultures where a woman's social



role is closely tied to her status as a wife. In certain societies, widows face stigma and are viewed as unlucky, impure, or burdensome. They may be excluded from social, religious, or family events. Many widows lose access to their husband's property or income, especially in places lacking strong inheritance rights for women. They often face financial instability and may be dependent on others for survival. Cultural traditions and practices may restrict their participation in certain activities or subject them to negative social attitudes. Economic vulnerability and limited access to resources can further compound the challenges faced by widows. In some legal systems, widows have limited or no rights to inheritance or child custody. Customary laws may override statutory laws, denying widows legal recourse. Widows may also be discouraged or even forbidden from remarrying, particularly younger widows, which can trap them in long-term dependency or isolation. Without strong social or economic support, widows may be vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, or coercion, including sexual violence or being forced into unfavorable marriages. Understanding the societal position of widows is essential for addressing the barriers they encounter and advocating for social change. By challenging stigmatization, promoting gender equality, and enhancing social support networks, societies can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for widows. This research aims to explore the psychological aspects of widowhood and their connection to the societal position of widows.

#### **OBJECTIVES :**

- To explore the psychological and Societal challenges faced by the widows.
- To identify the factors that contribute to the psychological well-being or distress of widows.
- To study the inequalities and hardships faced by them in society.
- To explore the strategies to enhance the social integration and empowerment of widows.

#### **II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

**Brown and Lent (2018)** Widows' adjustment to spousal loss: The contribution of interpersonal factors and personality traits. This study explores the role of interpersonal factors and personality traits in the adjustment process of widows. It emphasizes the significance of social support, relationships with family and friends, and individual characteristics in facilitating or hindering the adaptation to spousal loss among widowed individuals. The study identifies certain personality traits that contribute to widows' adjustment. Specifically, extraversion and conscientiousness are associated with better adjustment outcomes, whereas neuroticism is linked to higher levels of grief and depressive symptoms.

**Keene, J. R., & Prochaska, J. M. (2018)** Bereavement, grief, and mourning: A scoping review of the literature. This scoping review explores the literature on bereavement, grief, and mourning, with a specific focus on widows. The study provides an overview of key themes and findings related to the experience of grief and mourning among widows. It highlights the diverse range of emotions, coping strategies, and challenges faced by widows during the grieving process, emphasizing the need for individualized support and interventions.

**Schaefer, C., & Quesnel-Vallée, A. (2017)** What widowhood does to the brain: A systematic review of MRI and fMRI studies on widowhood. This systematic review explores the impact of widowhood on brain structure and function through MRI and fMRI studies. The findings suggest that widowhood is associated with changes in brain regions involved in emotional processing and social cognition, providing insights into the neural mechanisms underlying the bereavement process. The review highlights the complex interplay between grief, stress, social support, and brain changes in widowed individuals. It suggests that widowhood may lead to neural adaptations as individuals navigate the emotional and social challenges of spousal loss.

**Stroebe, M., Schut, H., & Boerner, K. (2017)** Cautioning health-care professionals: Bereaved persons are misguided through the stages of grief. This review cautions against the rigid application of the stages of grief model in understanding the experiences of bereaved individuals, including widows. It argues for a more nuanced and individualized approach to grief support that recognizes the diverse responses and needs of grieving individuals. The authors suggest that promoting the idea of fixed stages of grief may lead to pathologizing normal grief reactions and overlooking the diversity of bereavement experiences. They emphasize the importance of acknowledging the individuality and variability of grief responses and tailoring support and interventions accordingly.

**Teixeira, R. J., & Pereira, M. G. (2013)** Predictors of complicated grief in widow. This study explores predictors of complicated grief in



a widow. It identifies factors such as the nature of the relationship with the deceased, the circumstances of the death, and social support as significant influences on the development of complicated grief symptoms among widowed individuals. The findings reveal several significant predictors of complicated grief among widows. For example, younger age, lower education level, and longer duration of the marital relationship are associated with higher levels of complicated grief symptoms. Additionally, the study highlights the role of coping strategies and social support in shaping grief reactions, with adaptive coping and strong social support buffering against the development of complicated grief. **Brennan, M., & Kehoe, C. (2013)** Dementia and widowhood: This systematic review explores the intersection of dementia and widowhood. It examines the prevalence of dementia among widows, the prognosis for widows with dementia, and the interventions and assessment strategies relevant to this population. Additionally, the review highlights assessment interventions for this population, focusing on the evaluation of cognitive functioning, mental health, and social support. It discusses the importance of early detection and appropriate support services for widows with dementia. **Boerner, K., & Reinhardt, J. P. (2009)** Widowhood in late life: This article provides a comprehensive review of the literature on widowhood in late life. It covers various aspects such as grief, coping strategies, social support, health outcomes, and the unique challenges faced by older widows. Social support has been conceptualized and assessed in both cognitive and behavioral terms, as the perception that support would be available if needed, and alternately, as the actual receipt of support. **Neimeyer, R. A., & Sands, D. C. (2009)** Continuing bonds in bereavement: This article discusses the concept of continuing bonds in bereavement, which refers to maintaining a relationship with the deceased spouse in some form. It explores the implications of continuing bonds for widows and their grief process. The article highlights the shift in understanding bereavement from a perspective of detachment and moving on to one that acknowledges the enduring bond with the deceased. The authors argue that continuing bonds can serve important adaptive functions in the grieving process, providing comfort, meaning-making, and facilitating ongoing connections to the deceased. **Carr, D., & Bodnar-Deren, S. (2009)** Gender, aging, and widowhood: This review article specifically focuses on the intersection of gender, aging, and widowhood. It examines the gender differences in widowhood experiences, including the social, emotional, and economic aspects of widowhood for older women. The authors examine various factors related to gender and widowhood, including economic disparities, caregiving responsibilities, social networks, and cultural expectations. They discuss how these factors can impact the well-being, health outcomes, and quality of life of older widows. **Martikainen, P., Valkonen, T., & Moustgaard, H. (2009)** The effects of widowhood on mortality: A prospective analysis of the Finnish population. This study examines the effects of widowhood on mortality rates in the Finnish population. The findings suggest that widowhood is associated with an increased risk of mortality, emphasizing the importance of understanding and addressing the health implications of spousal loss. The study reveals a significant difference in mortality rates between widowed individuals and married individuals, suggesting that widowhood has a substantial impact on overall survival. **Holley, L. C., Mast, B. T., & Baumann, H. M. (2008)** Predictors of late-life remarriage among widowed and divorced older adults: This study explores the predictors of late-life remarriage among older adults who have experienced widowhood or divorce. The authors examine various factors that influence the likelihood of remarriage, such as demographic characteristics, social support, health status, and psychological well-being. The findings suggest that age, gender, education, and income level are important predictors of remarriage among older adults. **(Fasoranti et al., 2007)** Loss of spouse is one of the most negative life events, next only to the loss of a child. Ironically, the disorganization and trauma that follow the death of a spouse seem to be greater in women than in men whenever either loses their spouse. Widowhood presents a myriad of economic, social and psychological problems, particularly in the first year or so after the death of the spouse. A major problem for both sexes is economic hardship. When the husband was the principal breadwinner, his widow is now deprived of his income and the nucleus of the family is destroyed. **Juntunen, K., Suutala, E., & Mykkänen, J. (2007)** Coping with the loss of a spouse: Narratives of older widowed men. This qualitative study explores the coping experiences of older widowed men. Through their narratives, the study highlights various coping strategies and emotional processes used by widowers to navigate the challenges of spousal loss and adjust to life without their partner. The study also sheds light on the emotions experienced by widowed men, including grief, sadness, loneliness, and a longing for companionship. The men express a range of emotions, demonstrating the complexity of their grieving process and the individual differences in their coping styles. **Carr, D. (2004)** The



psychological consequences of losing a child: Although not specific to widows, this article provides a critical review of the literature on the psychological consequences of losing a child, which can be relevant to widows who may have experienced the loss of a child. It discusses grief, coping, and psychological adjustment following such a profound loss. The review highlights the diverse range of psychological consequences experienced by individuals who have lost a spouse. Emotional responses, such as grief, sadness, and loneliness, are commonly reported. Social consequences include changes in social roles, relationships, and support networks. The cognitive impacts of spousal loss can involve changes in identity, worldview, and future plans. **Vanderwerker, L. C., & Prigerson, H. G. (2004)** Social support and technological connectedness as protective factors in bereavement: This study examines the role of social support and technological connectedness as protective factors in bereavement among widows. It highlights the importance of social connections and the potential benefits of utilizing technology for support during the grieving process. Bereavement is associated with heightened risk of mental and physical health impairments as well as social isolation. The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of social support and technological connectedness on major depressive disorder (MDD), complicated grief (CG), posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and quality of life. **Carr, D., & House, J. S. (2003)** Widowhood in late life. This article explores the dynamics of gender, marital power, and marital quality in later life, including the experiences of widows. It discusses how gender and power dynamics within marriage influence marital quality and their implications for widows' psychological well-being. It examines the effects of marital status, transitions, and quality for adult health. It points out the limitations in current research, discusses implications of recent findings for policy, and highlights theoretical and methodological directions for future research. **Lund, D. A., & Caserta, M. S. (2002)** Widowhood: A systematic review of research on adjustment to a late-life spouse's death. This article provides a comprehensive review of research on widowhood, focusing on the adjustment process following the death of a spouse in later life. It examines various factors related to grief, coping mechanisms, social support, and the role of gender in the widowhood experience. Spouse/partner bereavement can adversely impact the performance of daily living tasks that are essential for health and independent functioning. **(Lee, 2002)** Women are more likely than men to be widowed for two reasons. First, women live longer than men (a fact highlighted by worldwide data regarding differences in life expectancies of men and women). In addition, women tend to marry older men, although this gap has been narrowing. Because women live longer and marry older men, their odds of being widowed are much greater than men's. **Carr, D., & Utz, R. L. (2002)** Late-life widowhood in the United States: This article discusses late-life widowhood in the United States, exploring new directions in research and theory. It examines the challenges faced by widows, including social, emotional, and financial aspects, and provides insights into the diverse experiences of widows in later life. They argue that widowhood is a multifaceted transition, and that its personal consequences are contingent upon macrosocial conditions, such as demographic patterns and gender-based allocation of social roles; dyadic characteristics, including marital quality; and individual-level attributes, such as gender. **Relf, M. V. (2000)** Widowhood: This critical review examines the literature on widowhood, focusing on the experiences and challenges faced by widows. The article discusses the psychological, social, and economic implications of widowhood, highlighting the need for research and interventions that address the unique needs of this population. The review covers a wide range of areas related to widowhood, including the psychological, social, and economic consequences of spousal loss. Relf explores the factors that influence widows' adjustment and well-being, such as age, health, socioeconomic status, and social support. The author also highlights the diverse experiences of widows, recognizing the differences in coping strategies, grief processes, and emotional reactions among individuals.

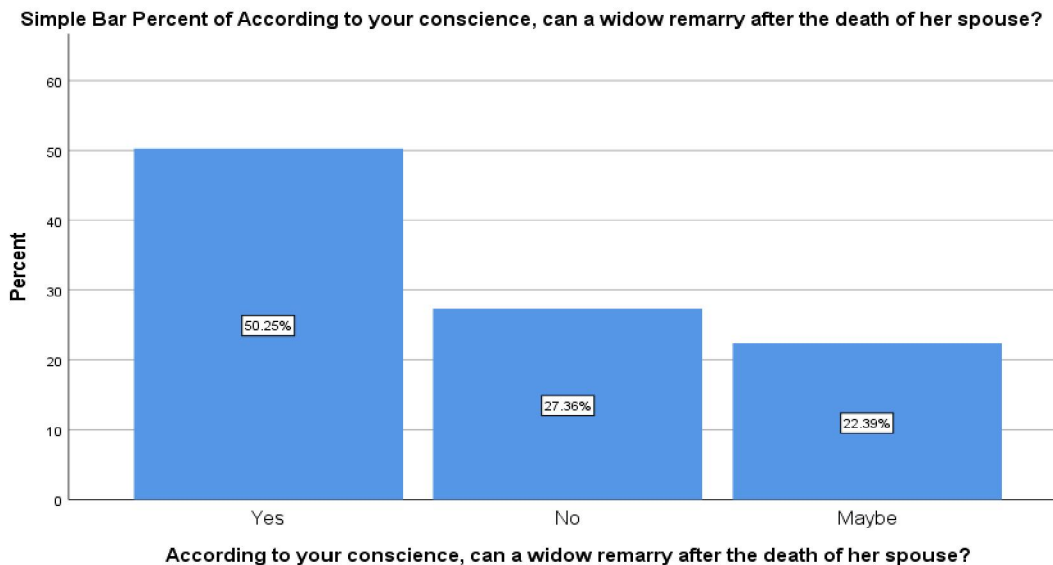
### III. METHODOLOGY

The research method followed is descriptive research. The data is collected through a questionnaire and a sample size is 200. Convenience sampling method is adopted in the study to collect the data. The samples were collected through online survey and from general public. The independent variables are gender, age, educational qualification, occupation and place of residence of the respondents. The dependent variables are can a widow remarry after the death of her spouse, is the widow treated well in the family as well as in the society and the major psychological sufferings of widowhood.



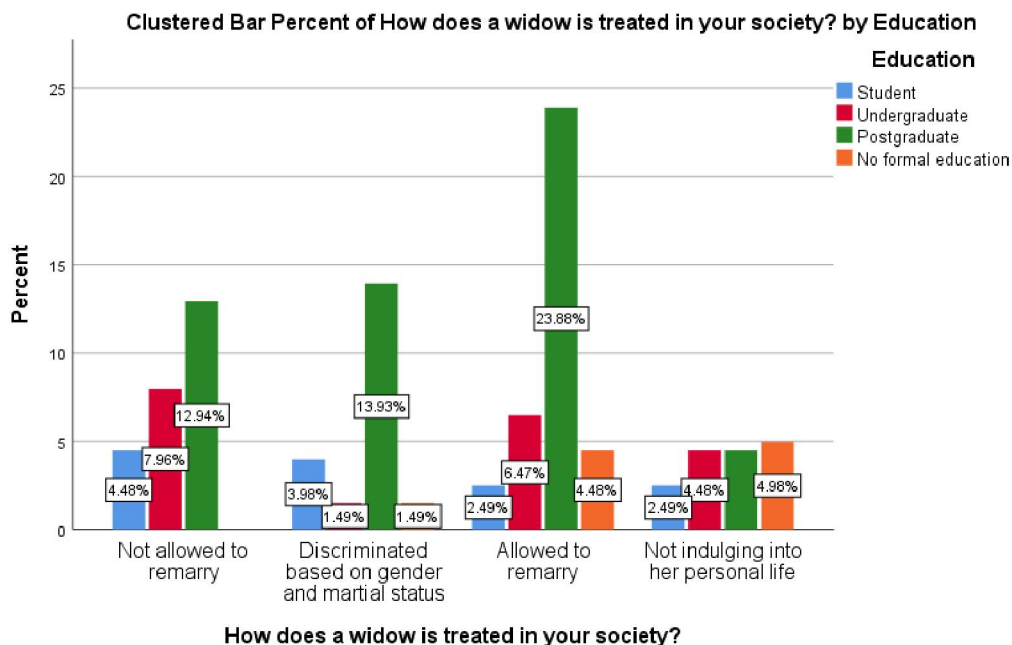
#### IV. ANALYSIS

**FIGURE 1 :**



**LEGEND :** Figure 1 shows the agreeability of the respondents on whether a widow can remarry after the death of her spouse.

**FIGURE 2 :**



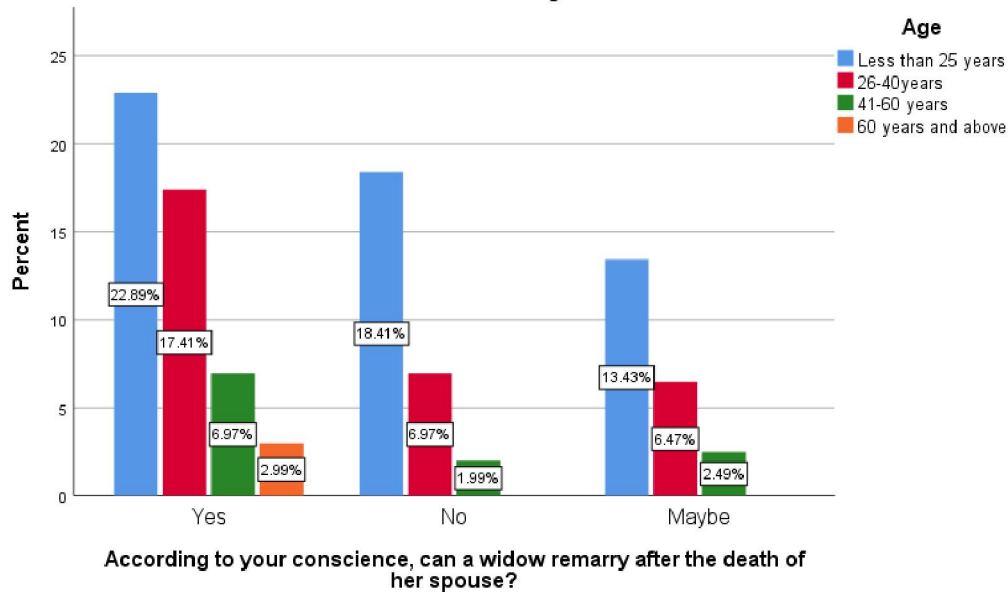
**LEGEND :** Figure 2 shows the view of the respondents on the treatment of widows in their society with respect to their education.





**FIGURE 3 :**

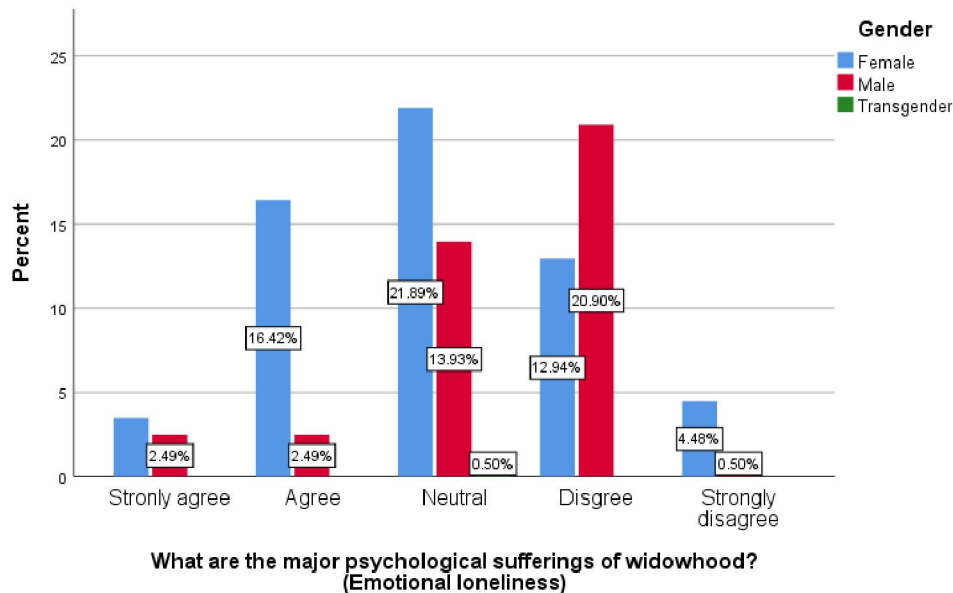
Clustered Bar Percent of According to your conscience, can a widow remarry after the death of her spouse? by Age



**LEGEND :** Figure 3 shows the agreeability of the respondents on whether a widow can remarry after the death of her spouse with reference to their age.

**FIGURE 4 :**

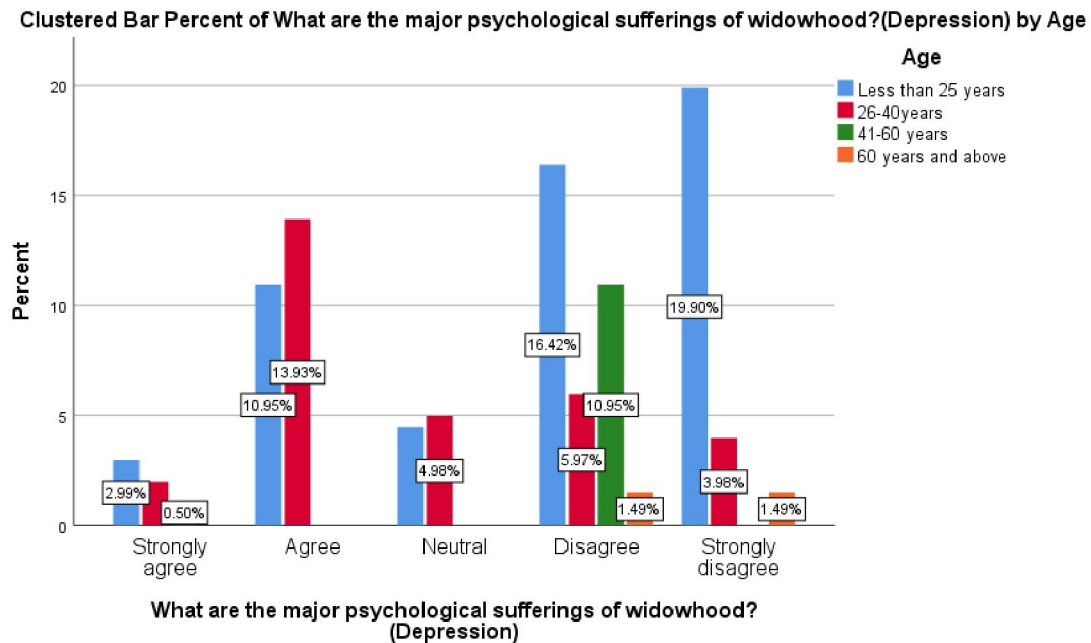
Clustered Bar Percent of What are the major psychological sufferings of widowhood?(Emotional loneliness) by Gender



**LEGEND :** Figure 4 shows the major psychological sufferings of widowhood as emotional loneliness with reference to the occupation of the respondents.

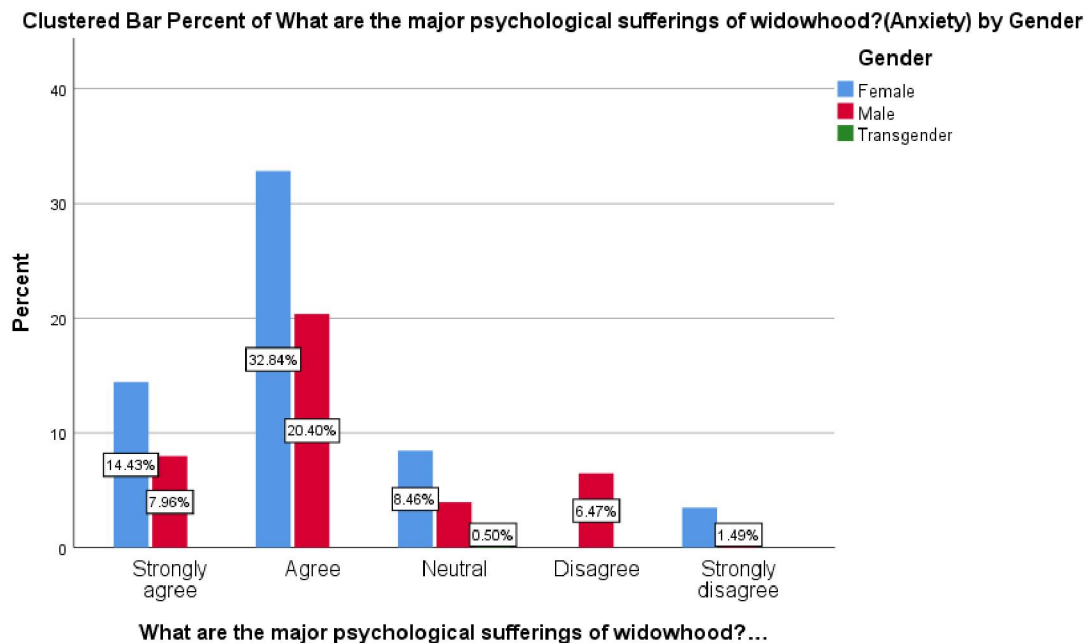


**FIGURE 5 :**



**LEGEND :** Figure 5 shows the major psychological sufferings of widowhood as depression with reference to the age of the respondents.

**FIGURE 6 :**

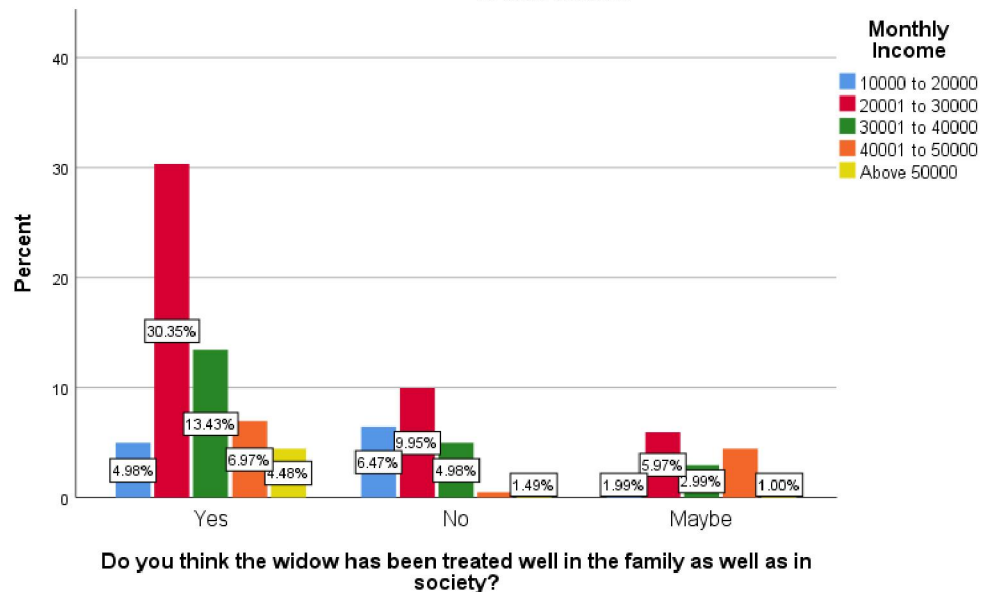


**LEGEND :** Figure 6 the major psychological sufferings of widowhood as anxiety with reference to the gender of the respondents.



**FIGURE 7 :**

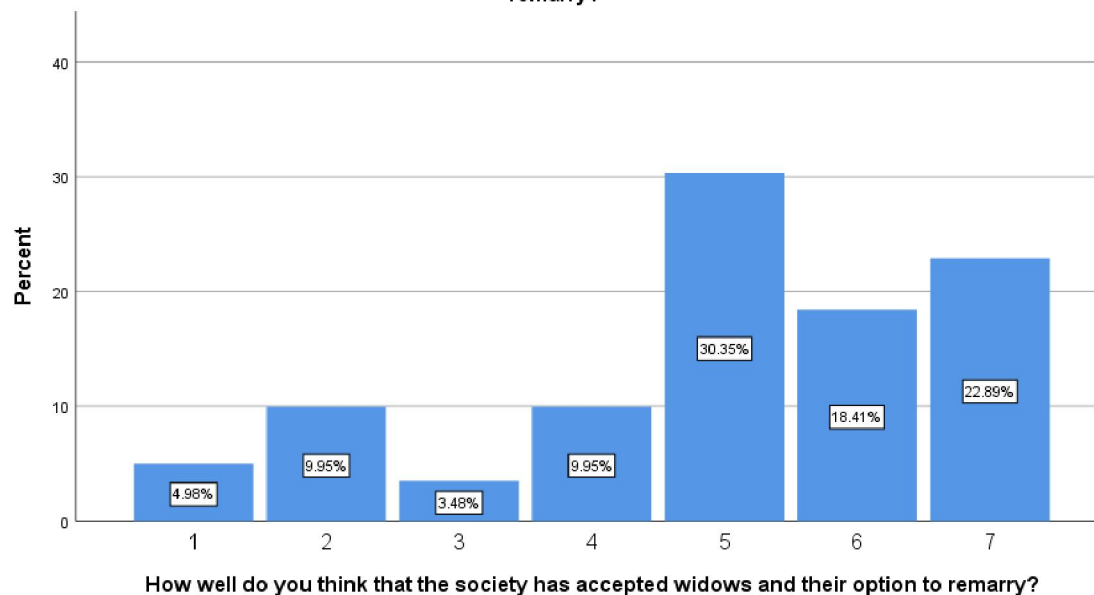
Clustered Bar Percent of Do you think the widow has been treated well in the family as well as in society? by Annual Income



**LEGEND :** Figure 7 shows the monthly income of the respondents and their view on whether the widow has been treated well in the family as well as in the society.

**FIGURE 8 :**

Simple Bar Percent of How well do you think that the society has accepted widows and their option to remarry?

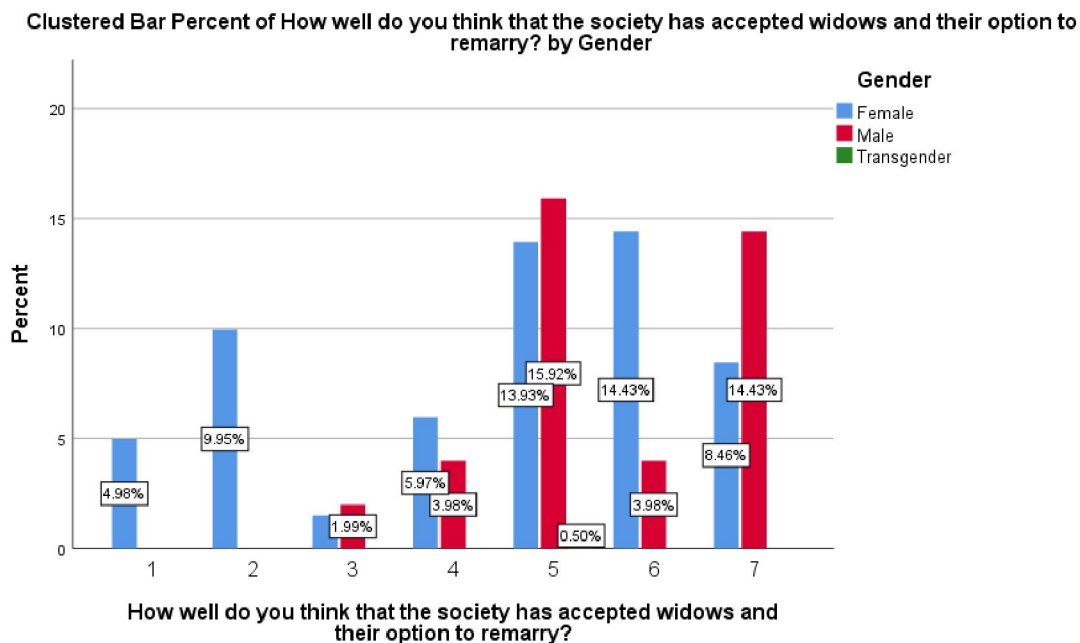


**LEGEND :** Figure 8 shows the respondent's view on how well the society has accepted widows and their option to remarry.



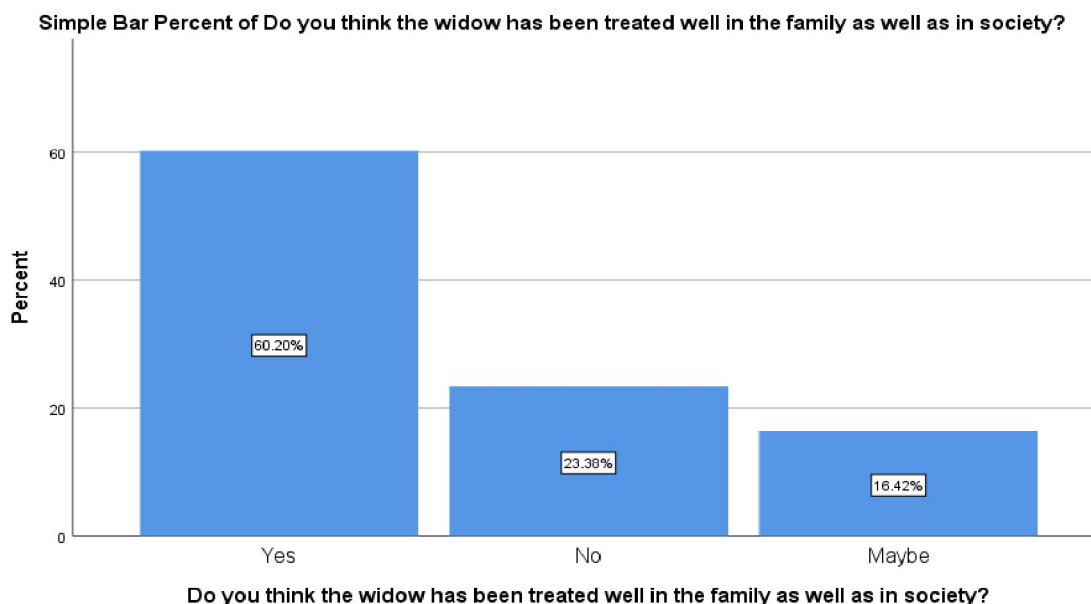


**FIGURE 9 :**



**LEGEND :** Figure 9, shows the respondent's view on how well the society has accepted widows and their option to remarry with respect to their gender.

**FIGURE 10 :**



**LEGEND :** Figure 10 shows the respondent's view on whether the widow has been treated well in the family as well as in the society.



## V. RESULTS

FIGURE 1 : From the graph, it shows that 50.25% of the respondents have answered yes and agreed that a widow can remarry after the death of her spouse. FIGURE 2 : From the graph, it shows that 23.88% of the postgraduate respondents have answered that widows in their society are allowed to remarry and 13.93% of the postgraduate respondents have answered that widows are discriminated against based on their gender and marital status. FIGURE 3 : From the graph, it shows that 22.89% of the respondents in the age group of less than 25 years have answered yes and agreed that a widow can remarry after the death of her spouse. FIGURE 4 : From the graph, it shows that 21.89% of the female respondents have answered neutral that the major psychological sufferings of widowhood is emotional loneliness. FIGURE 5 : From the graph, it shows that 19.90% of the respondents in the age group of less than 25 years strongly disagreed that the major psychological sufferings of widowhood is depression. FIGURE 6 : From the graph, it shows that 32.84% and 14.43% of the female respondents have agreed and strongly agreed that the major psychological sufferings of widowhood is anxiety. FIGURE 7 : From the graph, it shows that 30.35% of the respondents whose annual income is 20001 to 30000 have answered yes and agreed that the widow has been treated well in the family as well as in society. FIGURE 8 : From the graph, it shows that 30.35% of the respondents have opted 5 in a scale of 1-7 on the acceptance of widows in the society and their option to remarry. FIGURE 9 : From the graph, it shows that 15.92% of male respondents have opted 5 in a scale of 1-7 on the acceptance of widows in the society and their option to remarry. FIGURE 10 : From the graph, it shows that 60.20% of the respondents have answered that the widow has been treated well in the family as well as in society.

## VI. DISCUSSION

FIGURE 1 : From the graph, it shows that 50.25% of the respondents have answered yes and agreed that a widow can remarry after the death of her spouse because a woman cannot live alone in the society for long she needs someone on whom she could rely on and to support her in her life. FIGURE 2 : From the graph, it shows that 23.88% of the postgraduate respondents have answered that widows in their society are allowed to remarry and 13.93% of the postgraduate respondents have answered that widows are discriminated against based on their gender and marital status, it is good that society is accepting widows to remarry because widows become lonely and emotionally weak and they need someone to look after her and her kids. FIGURE 3 : From the graph, it shows that 22.89% of the respondents in the age group of less than 25 years have answered yes and agreed that a widow can remarry after the death of her spouse, the respondents in this age group might have heard and read the sufferings of widowhood and it can be so cruel if they started to live alone. FIGURE 4 : From the graph, it shows that 21.89% of the female respondents have answered neutral that the major psychological sufferings of widowhood is emotional loneliness, it might be because emotional loneliness happens to certain widows if there is no one to look after her, in some cases the widows parents would make her feel secure. FIGURE 5 : From the graph, it shows that 19.90% of the respondents in the age group of less than 25 years strongly disagreed that the major psychological sufferings of widowhood is depression. FIGURE 6 : From the graph, it shows that 32.84% and 14.43% of the female respondents have agreed and strongly agreed that the major psychological sufferings of widowhood is anxiety. FIGURE 7 : From the graph, it shows that 30.35% of the respondents whose annual income is 20001 to 30000 have answered yes and agreed that the widow has been treated well in the family as well as in society. FIGURE 8 : From the graph, it shows that 30.35% of the respondents have opted 5 in a scale of 1-7 on the acceptance of widows in the society and their option to remarry. FIGURE 9 : From the graph, it shows that 15.92% of male respondents have opted 5 in a scale of 1-7 on the acceptance of widows in the society and their option to remarry, it is because the respondents are basically from urban and also the society has changed much in the recent years and people are being positive. FIGURE 10 : From the graph, it shows that 60.20% of the respondents have answered that the widow has been treated well in the family as well as in society, it is definitely because we are living in the 21st century where the concept feminism has grown much and the women's rights and needs are being recognised lately by the society.



## VII. LIMITATIONS

The psychological and societal experiences of widows are shaped by a range of limitations and challenges, many of which are deeply influenced by cultural, economic, and gender norms. In addition, the study faced limitations in terms of time, resources, and geographical coverage. A more thorough and large-scale study would have allowed for a more detailed and accurate analysis. However, due to time constraints and limited access to a diverse population sample, the findings may not fully represent the views of all sections of Indian society. Despite these challenges, the study provides valuable insights into psychological aspects of widows and their struggles to lead a life in the society.

## VIII. SUGGESTIONS

Establish accessible and affordable counseling services specifically tailored to address the psychological needs of widows, including grief counseling, trauma therapy, and support groups. Conduct public awareness campaigns to educate society about the psychological challenges faced by widows and the impact of societal attitudes on their well-being. Establish support networks and platforms where widows can connect with others who share similar experiences, facilitating mutual support and the exchange of coping strategies. Offer educational and vocational training programs to widows, empowering them with skills and knowledge that can enhance their confidence, employability, and social standing. Advocate for the elimination of discriminatory practices and attitudes towards widows. Promote gender equality, challenge harmful cultural beliefs, and work towards creating an inclusive society that values and respects widows.

## IX. CONCLUSION

The psychological aspects of widows and their societal position are intertwined and deserve careful consideration. Widowhood brings about various psychological challenges, including grief, loneliness, and a shift in identity and roles. These challenges are influenced by societal factors such as cultural beliefs, social support networks, and legal frameworks. Understanding and addressing the psychological needs of widows is essential for promoting their well-being and facilitating their integration into society. Providing access to mental health support, counseling services, and community resources can help widows navigate their grief and rebuild their lives. Additionally, challenging societal stigmas and stereotypes associated with widowhood can contribute to a more inclusive and supportive environment for widows. Efforts to address the psychological aspects of widowhood should focus on increasing awareness, providing accessible counseling services, challenging social stigma, enhancing social support networks, promoting financial empowerment, advocating for legal rights, integrating widow support in healthcare systems, conducting research, and fostering collaboration and coordination among stakeholders.

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