

# The Destitution of Widows in Rajasthan

What role has the state played ?

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## The Destitution of Widows in Rajasthan

### **Important findings 1: Employment status of widows**

1. 36 per cent widows are unemployed;
2. 48 per cent widows earn their living from unskilled, casual, painstaking, work;
3. 7 per cent widows are dependent on farming;
4. 6 per cent widows are employed in some formal work (like Anganwadi, teaching, etc.);
5. 3 per cent widows are engaged in vegetable selling, sewing etc.

### **Important findings 2: Widows vis-à-vis landholdings and BPL status**

1. 55% widows do not have land -- of which 18% are BPL and 37% are not ;
2. 18.5% widows have unirrigated land -- of which 9% are BPL and 9.5% are not;
3. 6% widows have irrigated land which is occupied by others -- of which 2% are BPL and 4% are not;
4. 11% widows are marginal farmers -- of which 2.5% are BPL and 8.5% are not;
5. 7.5% widows are small farmers;
6. 2% widows are medium farmers.

### **Important findings 3: Widows vis-à-vis landholdings and social security status**

1. 55% widows do not have land -- of which 21% receive widow pension and 34% do not;
2. 18.5% widows have unirrigated land -- of which 6% receive widow pension and 12.5% do not ;
3. 6% widows have irrigated land which are occupied by others -- of which 1% receive widow pension and 5% do not;
4. 11% widows are marginal farmers -- of which 4% receive widow pension and 7% do not ;
5. 7.5% widows are small farmers;
6. 2% widows are medium farmers.

### 1 Women in Rajasthan: A General Background

"Deorala Village, in Sikar District of Rajasthan, 4 September 1987: Roop Kanwar had been buried under a heavy load of firewood, so that she could not escape. The fire was lit once and died out. Partially burnt Roop Kanwar screamed and begged for mercy and help. Out of the 90 odd people who had gathered for Maal Singh's [husband of Roop Kanwar] funeral, most did not know that they were going to witness a *sati*. Those who could neither bear to see the pain of Roop Kanwar nor had the courage to help her, quietly moved away in shame as the fire was cruelly relit by those determined to murder her".

Indian Express, 19 September 1987

What links *sati* with the problems of widows is the fact that a married woman is regarded as a non-entity or a no-person after the death of her husband. "You are widow" means "you are dead". So, you die, and become a *sati*, and glorify our *dharma*. Or, you live, but stay away from all enjoyments of life, and glorify our *dharma*. The position of a woman after the death of husband in the ancient time in India has been well described by Ahuja (1996). Many authors have conceptualised widowhood of a woman in India as her social death (see, for example, Chakravarti, 1998). Chakravarti wrote: "The widow's social death stems from her alienation from reproduction and sexuality, .... Once a woman ceases to be wife (especially if she is childless) she ceases to be a 'person', neither daughter nor daughter-in-law" (p. 64). Also, in a case study carried out by Kumari (2001) in Rajasthan, it was reported that widows had been found to be physically alive but socially dead because, as the author observed, married woman had been found to be of no social existence after death of husband. Roop Kanwar was burnt in a State which produced famous Sanskrit scholars like Varahmihir, Brahmagupta, Magha, and other literary figures like Meera Bai, Chandra Bardai, Banki Das and many others. From the ancient to the modern times several scholars and intellectuals contributed to science, literature and arts, and also preached the ideology of humanism, but still crude, orthodox, Hindu fundamentalism has been hindering radical socioeconomic change in Rajasthan. The rest of the country is not of too much exception. The former Shankaracharya of Puri, Swami Niranjana Dev, bracketed women together with Harijans (so called untouchables) because both were not allowed to study the *shastras*. With no surprise, religious view and political view merge together when we look into the dialogues of Mahatma Gandhi who talked much for the empowerment of the Harijans, but did not condemn *sati*hood (see Singh and Singh, 1989: 57).<sup>1</sup> But at least Gandhi favoured remarriage of child widow which, however, was not even supported by Vivekananda. With such a religious-politico-historical background, we can somewhat expect the

<sup>1</sup>Singh and Singh (1989: 57) also wrote that Mahatma Gandhi rather advocated *sati*hood for grown-up widows i.e. widows who were not children. But the authenticity of this remark needs to be verified.

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overall status of women in general and economically backward widows in particular in this country. But at the same time it is also true that the great social reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Vidyasagar and others had fought a great fight against social injustices towards women.

Rural women in Rajasthan constitute the most deprived, downtrodden, illiterate, neglected and the weakest group of the population. They have been living in utter destitution, drudgery and stark poverty for centuries. There is no historical evidence to show that as a whole group they were ever given their due in socioeconomic terms. They are still awaiting fulfilment of the basic human needs. Even after so many years of independence, things have hardly changed (Raghuvanshi, 1983: 8). In general, they are unaware of their rights and duties as citizens of a sovereign republic. Due to illiteracy, poverty, and social inequality, the political awareness is almost absent among Rajasthan's rural women, except for those who are associated with any women's organisation. In the rural areas of the State, there are still numerous pockets where women do not know, even after about sixty years of independence, that the country has become independent or even the country had ever been ruled by the British for about 200 years. Naturally, in such areas, degree of exploitation -- be it economic, or social, or political -- that the rural women face is very high. Many rural women are concentrated in the primary sector, i.e. agriculture and animal husbandry, as mainly self-employed. Women's wages are, on an average, 30 per cent less than the wages of men. The increased use of cheap female labour has become an important strategy for landowners to cut costs in agriculture. There is no infrastructure for the implementation of the Minimum Wage Legislation in sectors like agriculture and home-based works, where women workers are concentrated (Institute of Development Studies Jaipur and UNIFEM, 2002).

Child marriage and polygamy are common in the State in spite of legal constraints. The Bhils are the only exception in the matter of child marriage. In the Bhil tribe, girls are seldom married before the age of twenty years (Raghuvanshi, 1983). Apart from this exception, the overall picture is not good in Rajasthan as far as the condition of women is concerned. The issue of violence against women continues to be a matter of concern in Rajasthan. It is reported that every 8 hours a woman is raped; every three hours there is a case of sexual harassment; and every two days three women are killed for dowry. However, innumerable such cases often go unreported and unrecognised. According to the official reports, the crime rate, i.e. number of crimes (as reported to the police) against women per lakh population,<sup>2</sup> was 24.5 for Rajasthan in 1999, which was the highest among all the states (Government of India, 1999). It is to be noted that feudalism as a socio-cultural legacy, combined with patriarchal values, still dominates the lives of women in Rajasthan. In the contemporary context, female infanticide has been reported in western Rajasthan, though it is never openly acknowledged. The Bhatias of Jaisalmer pride themselves that no *barat* has entered their village as no girl child survives (Institute of Development Studies Jaipur and UNIFEM, 2002). Latest information about the Bhati community has been available from Manohar Singh, Secretary of Maru Jyoti Udai Vikas Sansthan, Jaisalmer, who has conducted a field-based study on the Bhatias. Excerpts are given in Box 1.

<sup>2</sup>1 lakh = 100,000.

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### Box 1: Girl children in the Bhati community

Recently, i.e. approximately after 150-200 years, the first *barat* came to Devera village of Jaisalmer (the place where the Bhaties are concentrated). Who did first show courage of raising a girl child and what did motivate him to do so? It was Inder Singh, ex-sarpanch of Devera gram panchayat, who first raised a girl child. Perhaps due to his socio-political power his fellow villagers did not dare to resist him. Moreover, a Sadhu's (Hindu saint) prophecy had provoked Inder Singh to raise a girl child; and since there had been a spiritual intervention, other villagers might have had no option open but to indulge Inder in following the Sadhu's instructions. The story is as follows. Inder's wife had given birth of baby girls for three consecutive times and, according to the Bhati rules, they had been killed immediately after birth. Inder went to a Sadhu for obtaining spiritual blessings so that his wife could give birth of a baby boy instead of girl. Sadhu suggested him not to kill the next baby even if it would be a girl and thereafter the girl would be followed by a number of boys over a few years. The villagers did not dare to ignore the Sadhu's words. Inder's wife gave birth of a baby girl who was not killed for the first time. And, coincidentally, the baby girl was followed by three baby boys over the span of a few years. Inder's daughter has got married recently. After Inder had initiated, some other villagers have been motivated in raising girl children in the village. Now there are eight unmarried girl children in Devera village. The poor complains that the practice or custom of paying heavy dowry (currently, about Rs. 10 lakh per bride) to bridegroom's family during marriage has barred them from giving birth of girls. The rich do not want to lose their social prestige by bowing down their heads before the bridegroom's family during and after marriage of their girl children. Thus it has become a social practice. Police or administration does not take any action against the Bhaties for the infanticides of baby girls because most of the police officers in the District are Rajpoots who do not want to be the target of revenge of the other Rajpoot group, i.e. the Bhaties. The police officers say that they may have to send their girls to Bhati families as brides and so they are not in a position to take action against them

If this is the condition of women in general, then what is the condition of rural poor widows in Rajasthan? Let us take a look at them in the following sections.



## 2 Widows in Rajasthan: A Brief Literature Review

According to the Census of India 2001 data, the number of women in Rajasthan is 2,70,87,177 and the number of widows is 15,89,726 which is 5.87 per cent of the total female population of the State (and which is 2.8 % of the total population of the State). Of the total number of widows, 12,44,074 widows have been found to be living in rural areas and 3,45,652 have been found to be staying in urban areas. In Table 1, we observe that the proportion of widows to total female population in India over the Census years has been continuously decreasing and the same thing is happening in Rajasthan too.

**Table 1: Widows in India and Rajasthan**

	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
India (percentage to total female population)	10.82	8.86	8.06	7.4	6.9
Rajasthan (percentage to total female population)	9.52	7.80	7.12	-	5.87

*Source:* Census of India

**Table 2: Number of Widows in Rajasthan**

	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Number of widows in Rajasthan	9,13,112	9,57,950	11,68,228	-	15,89,726

According to the Census of India data, while in 1961 widows constituted 10.82 per cent of the total female population, in 1971 the percentage declined to 8.86, in 1981 to 8.06, in 1991 to 7.4, and in 2001 to 6.9. Such a decreasing trend is also observed in the case of Rajasthan. But, the absolute number of widows is continuously increasing in Rajasthan over the years (see Table 2). Also, one can hardly say that society's attitudes towards widows have rapidly been changing in a positive direction. Quite a lot of widows in India are still living with social stigma since many common people believe that a married woman's ill-luck is responsible for her husband's death. Hence, especially in rural areas, a widow is often barred to join any special occasion like marriage ceremony etc. Such a social phenomenon has a negative impact on their economic condition in various ways and, consequently, they often face terrible economic hardship. A few studies have been carried out on the socio-economic conditions of the poor widows in Rajasthan. We will look into them. But, before that, let us get an overall picture of the employment pattern of the widows in the country. Table 3 suggests that the share of unemployed among the rural widows is considerably high. Widows who are employed constitute a major share in wage employment as casual labourer.

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**Table 2: Primary Occupations of Widows: Two Studies at Village Level (Percentages)**

Primary Occupation	Chen Study <sup>a</sup> N=545	Drèze Study <sup>b</sup> N=86
<b>Wage Employment</b>		
Casual Labour	18	15
Salaried Labour	2	0
<b>Self-employment</b>		
Farm	10	3
Non-farm	7	7 <sup>c</sup>
<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>74</b>

*Notes and sources:* <sup>a</sup> Chen (2000) study was conducted in seven Indian states including Rajasthan (time of interview: 1991-92).

<sup>b</sup> Drèze (1990) study was conducted in three Indian states excluding Rajasthan.

<sup>c</sup> In Chen study, livestock-rearing is included under non-farm self-employment.

If livestock-rearing had been included in Drèze study, the extent of unemployment would have been less severe, but still alarmingly high

Ahuja (1996) has carried out a study on both middle-income and low-income groups of widows of Jaipur city in Rajasthan. From his study, we come to know that the social involvement of widows in social roles and social relationships is dependent less on their own initiatives and self-confidence and more on the will of heads of families and social pressures. Traditional culture discourages widows from taking to assertive social engagements outside the home and related interactions. Widows are dependent upon traditional support networks, i.e., on in-laws and parents in young and early middle age and sons in late middle and old age for social, emotional and economic supports (Ahuja, 1996).

Given the general dependence of women on men and men's privileged access to productive resources and employment, a widow's economic status depends significantly on whether or not she lives in a household with an adult male. Although the likelihood, as found in Chen's (2000: 320) study, is that many widows live in households without adult males, widows who manage on their own are clearly handicapped because men tend to be better-educated and higher skilled than women and can play dominating roles in certain transactions and operations. For example, widows who try to manage the cultivation and sale of crops themselves face different constraints like lack of skills, manpower, experience, power in negotiating land, labour and other transactions, etc. In addition, a widespread taboo against widows using the plough poses a serious obstacle to them managing land. Due to this taboo, widows are dependent on men as far as farming is concerned. In Kithoor village in Rajasthan, Agarwal (1994: 313) found that tractor owners demanded advance payment or immediate

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cash payment for ploughing the fields of poor widows. One widow complained that a man did not face this problem because it was assumed that he would be able to work and repay. Chen (2000: 325) wrote: "During my fieldwork, several widows in different areas complained that they could not get men to plough their fields until after the men had completed ploughing their own fields. The widows went on to explain that the timing of ploughing affects crop yields and that, if they cannot get them ploughed in time, widows often have to leave their fields fallow." Chen provided other examples also. She met two barber (*Nai*) widows in Rajasthan -- Khemani Bai and Dhapu Bai -- whose husbands had taken government jobs and discontinued their caste occupation. After being widowed, both women decided to reactivate their traditional line of work. To do so, both had to negotiate with their former patron households. Some patrons said they did not want the services of a barber's wife without the services of a barber. Thamu Bai, a Brahmin widow from Rajasthan, used to live with her son who was chronically ill. When Thamu Bai began to work as an agricultural labourer, her caste neighbours did not chastise her because they knew that she was needy, that her son could not work, and that she would otherwise turn to them for support. In addition to her income from wage labour, Thamu Bai earns a modest harvest share by sharecropping out her land. In this case, male dominance did not occur since men were afraid of taking extra liabilities in anticipation that the widow would come to them and seek financial help. Metha Bai, a Rajput widow from Rajasthan, was widowed in 1989. Her caste norm did not allow her to be engaged in any gainful employment outside her home. As she expressed her predicament: "I may die, but still I cannot go out. If there's something in the house, we eat. Otherwise, we go to sleep" (Chen, 2000: 343).

From the brief survey of literature presented above, it has been clear that after the death of husband a woman falls in great crisis and faces tremendous hardship. She needs help more specifically, she needs economic support and the state needs to provide her with the support in the form of social security. What is the general picture of state support to widows in India? The different Indian states have different pension schemes for widows and the schemes, in general, have received vehement criticism from the activists and scholars for a number of reasons. Shrivastava (2002: 97) pointed out that "[s]upport from the State in the form of Widow Pension in all states is a problem. The amounts are Rs. 100 or Rs. 200 or at most Rs. 500 per month; the procedures to receive the pension are difficult. Some states have a fixed quota of widow pensions for each year; the state that has Rs. 500 gives the pension for 3 years and then stops it because in the 3 years, the widow is supposed to have taken income generation training and have become economically self-sufficient!" Shrivastava went on arguing that "[t]he conditions that qualify widows for pensions are absurd. If a widow has a son aged 18 or older (supporting her or not), if she owns any land (1 *bigha* even), if she has a monthly income of over Rs. 1000, then she will not be eligible for the government pension of Rs. 100. It is widely held that the widow pension amounts and procedures are in dire need of reform" (p. 98). Now, in the following section, we will examine the widow pension scheme in Rajasthan.

### 3 Social Security Schemes for Widows in Rajasthan

#### (a) Widow Pension Scheme

The widow pension scheme has started in Rajasthan in 1974. Initially, old-age pension scheme and widow pension scheme were in a combined form. Later the Government made them two separate schemes. Currently, under the widow pension scheme, an eligible widow is entitled to receive Rs. 200 per month. Till 1999, an amount of Rs. 125 used to be provided per poor widow per month. In 2005-06 the government decided to distribute 10 kgs of wheat per widow per month at free of cost, since they thought that an amount of Rs. 200 was not enough for a widow to maintain her subsistence level (in case of non-availability of wheat in the Ration Department for certain month/s, the government was supposed to distribute 7 kgs of rice per widow per month). Ultimately, however, this plan was not implemented due to lack of coordination between the Food Corporation of India, the Rajasthan government, and the national government. Rajasthan then decided to increase the pension amount to approximately Rs. 50 beginning in 2006-07. The woman who has been widowed is eligible to apply for pension. There is no age bar in applying but there are two restrictions. One, the widow should have less than 11 *bigha*<sup>3</sup> of unirrigated land, or 5½ *bigha* of irrigated land. The second restriction is that the widow must not have son/s of more than 18 years old. The first restriction carries some logic, although occupying land does not necessarily mean that the owner has the means, or can afford, to cultivate it. The second restriction is completely illogical. There is no guarantee that all adult sons will be able to find employment and support their widowed mothers, and many sons that have jobs are reluctant to support their mothers, especially when the sons are married. This is a complicated issue and the problems related to this issue may be viewed from manifold angles. It is true that the Indian value norms support the view that if a man dies earlier than his wife, the responsibility of supporting his widow passes to his matured sons. But things in reality are not as easy as it is projected through the so-called value-myth. Chen (2000: 228) has presented a case from Tamil Nadu of a fifty-year-old widow who lived alone:

*In this case, two out of three sons -- all of whom migrated in search of jobs -- live up to their filial responsibility. Dhanapakiam was married at sixteen and widowed at forty. Her married son, who is a constable in an industrial security force in Madras city (Chennai), offers no support. Her two unmarried sons, who also have salaried jobs, provide support on a regular basis.<sup>4</sup> Dhanapakiam supplements what she gets from her sons by selling the milk from her one buffalo. This story has an uncertain ending as Dhanapakiam cannot be sure whether her two unmarried sons will withdraw support once they marry, as their older brother has done.*

<sup>3</sup> In Rajasthan, 1 hectare = approximately 4 *bigha* of land.

<sup>4</sup> Shrivastava (2002) alerts us that regular support does not necessarily mean full support.

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Chen found that quantitative data on the issue of married son's support to widowed mother is particularly hard to come by. The support provided ranges from regular support (in cash or kind), to periodic gifts, to nothing at all. In Chen's study, about one-third of the widows reported that they received regular support from adult sons who lived separately; and one-fifth reported that they received periodic gifts from adult sons who lived separately. In Ahuja's (1996) study in Jaipur city, only 8.9 per cent widows were found to be getting supports from sons.

There is another problem too. If a boy of less than 18 years old loses his father and is supposed to support his widowed mother after some years (i.e. after reaching adulthood), does he have access to proper training or education in his boyhood that might enable him to get a job and take family (economic) responsibilities after he is 18? Usually after the death of fathers, young children suffer hardships along with their widowed mothers who are to face many of the injustices and disadvantages like lack of support, disinheritance, insecure income etc. This often means that the ability of sons, once they mature, to support their widowed mother does not sufficiently develop due to lack of resources and education (Chen, 2000).

### **(b) Assistance Scheme for Marriage of Widows' Daughters**

In 1997-98 a scheme has started in the state under which poor widows (who have no other earning member in the family) are eligible to get an amount of Rs. 10,000 as assistance for each of their daughters' marriage (eligibility applies up to two daughters who, however, are not less than 18 years old). Initially, the amount provided was Rs. 5000 per marriage, but the amount has been elevated to Rs. 10,000 by an order dated 21 June 2003.

#### **4 The Macro Scenario of the Social Security Funding for Widows in Rajasthan**

As regards the macro view of the pension schemes, one needs to take a look into expenditures for both Widow Pension and Old Age Pension since often aged widows (those who are more than 55 years old) fall under the Scheme of Old Age Pension. Benefits, for widows, under both the pension schemes are same.

The State Government bears the full amount of the Widow Pension Scheme and there is no contribution from the part of the Central Government in this regard.

The total amount of money for the Old Age Pension Scheme consists of the contribution of the Union Government through the National Old Age Pension Scheme and the contribution of the State Government. The National Old Age Pension Scheme which is a part of the National Social Assistance Programme has been transferred to State Plan with effect from the year 2002-03. In 2002-03 the money under this Programme (including Annapurna Scheme)<sup>5</sup> was allocated to the State as additional central assistance, by which only a few schemes like the Annapurna Scheme, the Maternity Benefit Scheme<sup>6</sup> etc. were covered (Government of Rajasthan, 2002). Therefore, in 2002-03, for the Old Age Pension Scheme, the State Government had to bear the entire cost (see Table 3). In the subsequent years, the Central Government has not been allocating money to the State Government under the National Old Age Pension Scheme for any additional new registration with effect from 1 June 2003. Currently, the National Old Age Pension Scheme is operative only for those pensioners who have been registered before June 2003; the State Government has been solely bearing the expenditures for the newly registered old-age pensioners.

Very recently, we have visited the Social Welfare Department (Government of Rajasthan) for further clarification about all this. What they said is as follows. From 2002-03, the title of the scheme has been changed from National Old-Age Pension Scheme to Old-Age Pension Scheme. "National" part has been removed. And the Central Govt has been allocating money to the State Govt as a consolidated form of three schemes viz. Annapurna Scheme, National Family Benefit Scheme and Old-Age Pension Scheme under the Additional Central Assistance (ACA). The Central Govt. asked the state govt to put the priorities to the first two. For the first two years, i.e. for 2002-03 and 2003-04, the State Govt. had to bear the sole expenditure for the old-age pension scheme, since there was no additional fund left after meeting the expenditures for the first two (since the first two were the priorities). From 2004-05, the Centre has been allocating an increased amount, so the old-age pension scheme is currently being shared by both the State and Central Govts. Currently, the state govt. is giving Rs. 400 (with effect from 1 April 2006) to each beneficiary under the Old Age Pension Scheme. But the ratio of contributions made by the two governments is not necessarily fifty-fifty.

<sup>5</sup> The Annapurna Scheme, launched on 1 April 2000 as a centrally sponsored scheme (CSS), provides food security in the form of 10 kg of foodgrains per month at free of cost to destitute senior citizens with little or no regular means of subsistence from her/his own source of income or through financial support from family members or other sources.

<sup>6</sup> The Maternity Benefit Scheme is for the pregnant women (of 19 years old or above) of the BPL (below-the-poverty-line) families (limited up to first two alive children).

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**Table 4: Budgetary Allocations and Actual Expenditures under the Pension Schemes**

Rs. in lakh

S. No.	Year	Pension Scheme	No. of Beneficiaries	Revised Estimate (RE)			Actual Expenditure (AE)		
				Non-Plan	Plan	Total	Non-Plan	Plan	Total
1.	1998-99	Old-Age-Pension	284023	2200.00		2200.00	2874.35		2874.35
		Widow Pension	100526						
		<b>Total</b>	<b>384549</b>	<b>2200</b>		<b>2200</b>	<b>2874.35</b>		<b>2874.35</b>
2.	1999-00	Old-Age-Pension	394476	6561.00		6561.00	6767.27		6767.27
		Widow Pension	117139						
		<b>Total</b>	<b>511615</b>	<b>6561</b>		<b>6561</b>	<b>6767.27</b>		<b>6767.27</b>
3.	2000-01	Old-Age-Pension Central Govt. State Govt.	345602 76002	16221.00		16221.00	10207.50		10207.50
		Widow Pension	143953						
		<b>Total</b>	<b>565557</b>	<b>16221</b>		<b>16221</b>	<b>10207.50</b>		<b>10207.50</b>
4.	2001-02	Old-Age-Pension Central Govt. State Govt.	343257 59459	7526.26 1422.52		7526.26 1422.52	5210.35 1003.28		5210.35 1003.28
		Widow Pension	156179	3876.45		3876.45	3046.05		3046.05
		<b>Total</b>	<b>558895</b>	<b>12825.23</b>		<b>12825.23</b>	<b>9259.68</b>		<b>9259.68</b>
5.	2002-03	Old-Age-Pension (State Govt.)	287060	7850.11		7850.11	6402.31		6402.31
		Widow Pension	168023	4078.39		4078.39	3664.16		3664.16
		<b>Total</b>	<b>455083</b>	<b>11928.5</b>		<b>11928.5</b>	<b>10066.47</b>		<b>10066.47</b>
6.	2003-04	Old-Age-Pension	295490	7000.00		7000.00	6247.11		6247.11
		Widow Pension	174228	4000.00		4000.00	3659.20		3659.20
		<b>Total</b>	<b>469718</b>	<b>11000</b>		<b>11000</b>	<b>9906.31</b>		<b>9906.31</b>
7.	2004-05	Old-Age-Pension	337130	7000.00	1474.25	8474.25	5424.30	1474.25	6898.55
		Widow Pension	200816	4000.00		4000.00	4148.96		4148.96
		<b>Total</b>	<b>537946</b>	<b>11000</b>	<b>1474.25</b>	<b>12474.25</b>	<b>9573.26</b>	<b>1474.25</b>	<b>11047.51</b>
8.	2005-06	Proposed Target		Budget Estimate (BE)					
		Old-Age-Pension	365419	7500.00	516.53	8016.53			
		Widow Pension	221418	4000.00		4000.00			
		<b>Total</b>	<b>586837</b>	<b>11500</b>	<b>516.53</b>	<b>12016.53</b>			
9.	2006-07	Proposed Target							
		Old-Age-Pension							
		Widow Pension		5000.00					
		<b>Total</b>							

*Source:* Unpublished data, Department of Social Welfare; and Budget Volumes, Government of Rajasthan

### 4.1 Anomalies in funding

In Table 4, we see that the allocation of government funds for the Old Age Pension and the Widow Pension was in consolidated form until 2000-01. From 2001-02, the Government has been disbursing a separate amount for the Widow Pension Scheme. It is interesting to note that the actual expenditure for the Widow Pension has gone down from 2002-03 to 2003-04 by about Rs. 5 lakh, whereas the number of beneficiaries has gone up from 1,68,023 in 2002-03 to 1,74,228 in 2003-04, i.e. by 6,205. There has been no explanation from the Department of Social Welfare for such an inverse relationship between number of beneficiaries and actual expenditure.

In Table 4, the actual expenditure (AE) has been shown against the amount mentioned in the revised estimate (RE) which is usually prepared in the middle of a financial year. But we need to check the AE figures against the budget estimate (BE) figures as well, because BE is prepared by the government before a financial year starts and BE-AE differences need to be critically examined rather than RE-AE differences. Let us take an example. In 2003-04, according to BE, the Government of Rajasthan made a provision to spend an amount of Rs. 44 crore as widow pension (see Budget Book, 2003). In the middle of the year, the Government realized that the district authorities would not be able to spend the full estimated amount. So, they reduced the RE to Rs. 40 crore (see Table 4). At the year end, the AE was even lower of Rs. 36.59 crore (10 per cent less). Therefore, Rs. 3.40 crore of the RE remained unspent. While compared to the BE (i.e. original allocation), Rs. 7.40 crore remained unspent. Of this unspent money, according to the Accountant General's (AG) report on the 2003-04 Appropriation Accounts of the Government of Rajasthan, Rs. 7.38 crore were surrendered on 31 March 2004 due to less payment of pension to widows by the District Collectors than estimated (see Appropriation Accounts 2003-04: 171). In fact, as the AG report mentions that Rs. 2.05 lakh were saved. For the unspent money, the District Collectors were clearly held responsible by the AG. However, have the responsible District Collectors been identified for their inefficiency or irresponsibility? Have they been punished by the Government? We simply do not know the answers but can guess that, for such callousness, which is not exposed in public, the high level government officials will not face any penalty. Had the money not been surrendered by the District Collectors, a number of destitute widows would have benefited. Ultimately, the poor people are the victims. Moreover, such inefficiency of the government officials resulted in a reduction in the budgetary allocation for the Widow Pension Scheme for the years 2004-05 and 2005-06. The BE figure of Rs. 44 crore in 2003-04 was reduced to Rs. 40 crore in each of the subsequent two years (see Budget Book, 2004; 2005). In addition, we see that, in 2004-05, the AE figure under the Widow Pension is greater than both the RE figure (see Table 4) and BE figure (which is Rs. 40 crore and NOT shown in Table 4). The experience of 2004-05 is quite different from what we have seen in the case of 2003-04. One might misunderstand the case of 2003-04 and think that the demand for widow pension went down for that year (if we had not seen the report of the AG). But the data of 2004-05 prove that there was substantial demand for widow pension in the state and, therefore, no excuses could be allowed for the surrender of unspent money by the District Collectors. It is the duty of the government officials to reach, with the pension packages, the destitute widows living in the remotest corners of the state.



## The Destitution of Widows in Rajasthan

**Table 5: Districtwise Expenditures under the Widow Pension Scheme in 2004-05 and widow population 2001**

S. No.	District	<sup>a</sup> Widow Pension (Rs. in Lakh)	Widow Pension (in %)	<sup>b</sup> Widow Population (in number)	Widow Population (in %)
1.	Ajmer	229.16	5.48	79667	5.01
2.	Alwar	217.19	5.19	68439	4.31
3.	Banswara	109.74	2.62	36414	2.29
4.	Baran	79.96	1.91	26740	1.68
5.	Badmer	75.00	1.79	58157	3.66
6.	Bharatpur	153.78	3.68	46078	2.90
7.	Bhilwara	197.00	4.71	74397	4.68
8.	Bikaner	48.40	1.16	37954	2.39
9.	Bundi	65.00	1.55	27917	1.76
10.	Cittorgarh	159.06	3.80	63214	3.98
11.	Churu	144.00	3.44	51998	3.27
12.	Dausa	88.00	2.10	31145	1.96
13.	Dholpur	75.00	1.79	23285	1.46
14.	Dungarpur	137.00	3.28	30941	1.95
15.	Hanumangarh	61.30	1.47	34791	2.19
16.	Jaipur	246.30	5.89	133703	8.41
17.	Jaisalmer	15.00	0.36	13384	0.84
18.	Jalore	107.50	2.57	44978	2.83
19.	Jhalawar	83.20	1.99	34890	2.19
20.	Jhunjhunu	112.40	2.69	57127	3.59
21.	Jodhpur	177.49	4.24	80689	5.08
22.	Karoli	95.87	2.29	29126	1.83
23.	Kota	118.63	2.84	39335	2.47
24.	Nagaur	203.97	4.88	83906	5.28
25.	Pali	155.18	3.71	68481	4.31
26.	Rajsamand	150.12	3.59	37796	2.38
27.	Sawai Madhopur	98.00	2.34	28244	1.78
28.	Sikar	132.10	3.16	66667	4.19
29.	Sirohi	94.52	2.26	29298	1.84
30.	Shri Ganganagar	125.73	3.01	41089	2.58
31.	Tonk	141.22	3.38	38898	2.45
32.	Udaipur	284.50	6.80	70978	4.46
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4181.32</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>1589726</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Sources: <sup>a</sup>Unpublished Data, Department of Social Welfare, Government of Rajasthan

<sup>b</sup>Census of India 2001

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Table 5 represents districtwise expenditures under the Widow Pension Scheme for the year 2004-05. Table 5 also represents districtwise widow population in order to examine the districtwise share of expenditures against the districtwise share of widow population. In the districts of Badmer, Bikaner, Jaipur, Jhunjhunu, Jodhpur and Sikar, the proportions of expenditures are considerably lower than the shares of widow population. But, in Alwar, Bharatpur, Dungarpur, Rajsamand, Tonk and Udaipur, the shares of expenditures are much higher than that of widow population. The district level civil society organisations and people's organisations might have played an important role in the latter case. The data of both the Tables 4 and 5 (excluding population data) have been supplied by the Social Welfare Department, but surprisingly the aggregate data differ for the year 2004-05 in the two tables. The aggregate figure in Table 5 is a little higher than that in Table 4 for the year 2004-05. One reason for such discrepancy could be that the two tables have been prepared at two different points in time and, consequently, the latest table bears the higher figures since more data might have reached the Social Welfare Department Headquarter after the first table had been prepared. However, if the two tables have been prepared at almost the same point in time then it should be considered as a serious mistake.

Now let us turn our discussion towards another social security scheme through which poor widows are provided with financial assistance for their daughters' marriage. We have already given above the primary information about the scheme. Now we are going to examine the yearwise expenditures and corresponding number of beneficiaries under this scheme. Table 6 and Table 7 present the budgetary allocation-cum-expenditure and the number of beneficiaries respectively. Table 6 depicts that while an amount of Rs. 44.65 lakh was spent in 1999-00, the expenditure was drastically reduced to Rs. 10.00 lakh in 2000-01 and, consequently, so was the number of beneficiaries (see Table 7). After 2000-01, there has been an increasing trend in this spending which is a good indication. Since Widows' Organisations receive numerous complaints from their members about non-availability of this benefit, it is clear that allocation for this purpose needs to be continuously increased in the future too.

We now have got a picture of the widow pension in Rajasthan from the available evidence. We have discussed above how much money has been allocated and spent. But, in this connection we do not have sufficient quantitative data that will help us understand the general economic conditions of widows in Rajasthan and their need for social security. Therefore, what follows is this very much needed field-level study.

### **5 Objectives of the Present Study**

While the number of economically vulnerable widows in Rajasthan is quite large, quantitative analysis of the economic condition of widows has hardly been done. The Government provides widows with some social securities through widow pension and BPL facilities, among others. However, how far have these social securities been able to reach the vulnerable widows? This study seeks to address these issues through a quantitative analysis of primary data collected through field-survey.

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**Table 6 : Assistance for Marriage of Widows' Daughters**

	1998-99 AE			1999-00 BE			1999-00 RE			1999-00 AE			2000-01 BE			2000-01 RE		
	NP	P	Total	NP	P	Total	NP	P	Total	NP	P	Total	NP	P	Total	NP	P	Total
Through Women Welfare	0	3500	3500	0	4000	4000	0	3651	3651	0	3590	3590	0	0	0	0	1000	1000
Through Tribal Area Subplan (TSP)	0	0	0	0	1000	1000	0	1000	1000	0	875	875	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3500</b>	<b>3500</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5000</b>	<b>5000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4651</b>	<b>4651</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4465</b>	<b>4465</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1000</b>	<b>1000</b>
Rs. in thousand																		
	2000-01 AE			2001-02 BE			2001-02 RE			2001-02 AE			2002-03 BE			2002-03 RE		
	NP	P	Total	NP	P	Total	NP	P	Total	NP	P	Total	NP	P	Total	NP	P	Total
Through Women Welfare	1000	0	1000	800	0	800	4800	0	4800	4355	0	4355	4800	0	4800	4600	0	4600
Through Tribal Area Subplan (TSP)	0	0	0	200	0	200	200	0	200	200	0	200	200	0	200	400	0	400
<b>Total</b>	<b>1000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1000</b>	<b>1000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1000</b>	<b>5000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5000</b>	<b>4555</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4555</b>	<b>5000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5000</b>	<b>5000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5000</b>
Rs. in thousand																		
	2002-03 AE			2003-04 BE			2003-04 RE			2003-04 AE			2004-05 BE			2004-05 RE		
	NP	P	Total	NP	P	Total	NP	P	Total	NP	P	Total	NP	P	Total	NP	P	Total
Through Women Welfare	4509	0	4509	4600	0	4600	4600	0	4600	7691	0	7691	1	0	1	2500	0	2500
Through Tribal Area Subplan (TSP)	400	0	400	400	0	400	400	0	400	400	0	400	1	0	1	1	0	1
Through Jilla Parishad																		
<b>Total</b>	<b>4909</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4909</b>	<b>5000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5000</b>	<b>5000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5000</b>	<b>8091</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8091</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5002</b>	<b>10001</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10001</b>	<b>10498</b>
Rs. in thousand																		
	2005-06 BE			2005-06 RE			2005-06 AE			2006-07 BE								
	NP	P	Total	NP	P	Total	NP	P	Total	NP	P	Total						
Through Women Welfare	1	0	1	1	0	1	NA	NA	NA	1	0	1						
Through Tribal Area Subplan (TSP)	500	0	500	1000	1000	2000	NA	NA	NA	1000	0	1000						
Through Jilla Parishad	7500		7500	14000	4500	18500	NA	NA	NA	14000	1	14001						
<b>Total</b>	<b>8001</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8001</b>	<b>15001</b>	<b>5500</b>	<b>20501</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>20500</b>	<b>10001</b>	<b>15002</b>						

Note: AE = actual expenditure; RE = revised estimate; BE = budget estimate; NP = non-plan; P = plan; NA = these break-ups are not yet available, but the total for 2005-06 has been made available

Source: (1) Budget Volumes (revenue expenditures for social services) of different years; Government of Rajasthan  
(2) Social Welfare Department, Government of Rajasthan

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**Table 7: Number of Beneficiaries under the Scheme of Assistance for Marriage of Widows' Daughters**

Year	Number of Beneficiaries
1999-2000	893
2000-2001	200
2001-2002	911
2002-2003	982
2003-2004	1046
2004-2005	1050
2005-2006	2050

Source: Unpublished Data, Department of Social Welfare, Government of Rajasthan

### 6 The Primary Data

The fieldwork has been carried out in eight districts of Rajasthan. Why eight districts? The State of Rajasthan is divided into eight cultural zones and accordingly one district has been randomly selected from each cultural zone. Thereafter, two panchayats have been randomly selected from each district. And, finally, 25 samples have been randomly selected from a pair of panchayats. Therefore, in total, 200 samples have been randomly selected from eight districts. See Table 8 for the selected districts and blocks.

**Table 8: The Survey Blocks**

District	Block
Alwar	Thanagazi Umrain
Churu	Ratangarh Sujangarh Churu
Dungarpur	Dungarpur Beechiwada Sagwara Aspur
Bhilwara	Jahajpur Hoorda
Jhalawar	Sunail Khanpur Jhalra Patan
Sawaimadhopur	Sawaimadhopur Chothka Badwada
Ajmer	Pisangan Ajmer City Kishangarh City
Nagaur	Jayal Ladnu Parbatsar

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**The Findings**

**7.1 Age**

In the present study, about 86.5 per cent widows were found in the age group of 30s through 60s (see Table 9). The maximum number of widows (i.e. 26.5 per cent of the total number of widows) are in their 40s. Only 5 per cent widows were found in the very young group, i.e. in their 20s. The combined share of widows in the age groups of 70s and 90s constitutes 8.5 per cent. No respondents in their 80s were found in the study area.

Only 5 per cent widows, who were in their 20s, had a high probability of remarrying. The other 95 per cent widows had very low possibilities of remarrying.<sup>7</sup> Although some widows were found to be wage-employed (in heavy unskilled work, such as, stone grinding, carrying bricks, stones etc. in the work of road or building construction, among others) beyond the age group of 40s (because they have been pushed to do so to secure basic needs), virtually 49 per cent widows, who were in the age groups of above-40s, lost the possibility to be hired as wage-labourer for heavy work.

Within the age group of 20s, 40 per cent widows have been found to be working as wage-labourers, 30 per cent found in private jobs, and 30 per cent found to be without work.

**Table 9: Distribution of widows according to age**

Age group	No. of widows	Per cent
20s	10	5
30s	39	19.5
40s	53	26.5
50s	40	20
60s	41	20.5
70s	14	7
80s	0	0
90s	3	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

Within the age group of 30s, there were 64 per cent widows who have been found to be engaged in wage-employment (heavy, laborious, unskilled, work in construction etc.), 5 per cent as maidservants, 10 percent in Anganwari work,<sup>8</sup> 5 per cent in sewing work and farming, 2 per cent as para-teacher,<sup>9</sup> 4 per cent in other casual work, and 10 per cent as unemployed.

<sup>7</sup> Remarriage of widows is a social phenomenon with which caste factor is also attached. Remarriage of widows is not allowed in all castes. We are not going to discuss this in this study.

<sup>8</sup> The word "Anganwari" literally means 'a centre with a courtyard'. It is just a symbolic expression of the centres that are run under the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). ICDS addresses the needs of children under the age of six years. It seeks to provide young children with an integrated package of services such as supplementary nutrition, health care and pre-school education. Each Anganwari is supposed to cover a population of 1000 persons -- about 200 families. An Anganwari centre is operated by a modestly paid Anganwari worker who is assisted by an Anganwari helper (called as *sahayika*).

<sup>9</sup> Para-teachers are those who are employed on contractual basis at very low salary and deprived of several facilities that are enjoyed by regular government employees.

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Within the age group of 40s, 45 per cent of the respondents were engaged in wage-employment (heavy work), 13 per cent in vegetable selling, 5 per cent in farming, 6 per cent in Anganwari work, 23 per cent as jobless, and the rest in some other minor casual work.

Within the age group of 50s, 30 per cent widows were engaged in laborious wage-employment and 47.5 per cent have been found to be unemployed. Only 2.5 per cent widows were found to be engaged in vegetable selling, 5 per cent in Anganwari work, 2.5 per cent in begging, and the rest in other casual work and farming.

**Table 10: Age group and employment**

Age group	Engaged in unskilled, casual, laborious, work (%)	Engaged in other work (%)	Unemployed (%)
20s	40	30	30
30s	64	26	10
40s	45	32	23
50s	30	22.5	47.5
60s	12	10	78
70s	7	0	93
80s	0	0	0
90s	0	0	100

**Graph 1 : Wage employment and unemployment according to age group**



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Within the age group of 60s, 12 per cent widows were found to be working as wage-labourers, 78 per cent found to be unemployed, and the rest were found to be in small farming and other minor works.

We have already said that in the study area we did not find any widow who belonged to the age group of 80s. As far as the combined age group of 70s and 90s is concerned, we found that 6 per cent widows were working as casual wage-labourers (although not in laborious work). And the rest were found to be unemployed.

From the findings mentioned above, it is interesting to note that, starting from the age group of 30s till 90s, the share of wage-earners (who are engaged in heavy laborious work) decreases with age and the share of unemployed widows increases with age. This has been shown in Table 10 and Graph 1.

### 7.2 Dependants of widows

In the present study, a number of widows have dependants as illustrated in Table 11. This. Widows of the age group of 30-59 have the largest number of dependants. One thing needs to be noted here that dependants not only include children but also parents, parents-in-law, brother-in-law, etc.

**Table11: Age group vis-à-vis number of dependants**

Age group	No dependant	One dependant	Two dependants	Three dependants	Four dependants	Five dependants	Six dependants	Seven dependants
20-29	-	1	6	1	-	1	1	-
30-39	2	9	12	5	6	3	1	1
40-49	14	16	8	8	4	2	1	-
50-59	24	8	3	3	1	-	1	-
60-69	35	2	3	1	-	-	-	-
70-79	14	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
80-89	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
90-99	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>

### 7.3 Widow pension

In the study area, out of 200 widows 72 were found to be receiving widow pension and 128 were found not to be receiving widow pension. In other words, 36 per cent were widow-pensioners and 64 per cent were non-widow-pensioners (see Table 12). It is true that every widow is not poor and hence every respondent does not need widow pension to meet her basic needs. But most of the widows need help. This is evident in part from Table 23 which shows that most widow farmers have small landholdings and only 2 per cent are medium farmers and there is no widow who is large farmer. Moreover, Table 14 suggests that only 6 per cent widows are engaged in regular, formal, work. As a result, most widows are living in vulnerable condition. We will discuss the issues relating to nature of work, availability of work, landholding etc. later in detail.

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**Table 12: Number of widow-pensioner**

Pensioner/non-pensioner	Number of widows	Per cent
Widow-pensioner	72	36
Widow non-pensioner	128	64
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

In the age group of 20s, 40 per cent widows were widow-pensioners and 60 per cent non-pensioners. See Table 13 for more detail. In the age group of 30s, 67 per cent widows were found to be receiving widow pension and 33 per cent found to be receiving no pension. In the age group of 40s, 38 per cent widow-pensioners were found in the study area and 62 per cent were found to be non-pensioners. In the age group of 50s, 30 per cent widows were found to be receivers of widow pension and 70 per cent were found to be receivers of no pension. In the age group of 60s, while 20 per cent widows received pension, 80 per cent widows received no pension. In the age group of 70s, only 7 per cent widows were receiving widow pension and 93 per cent widows were receiving no pension. While Table 9 suggests that the highest number of widows was found in the age group of 40s, Table 13 depicts that only 38 per cent widows of this age group received widow pension. Besides, in Table 13, we find that the proportionate shares of widow-pensioners in younger age groups are higher than that in relatively old-age groups. For example, in the age groups of 20s and 30s, the proportions of widow-pensioners are 40 per cent and 67 per cent respectively, whereas this proportion has sharply decreased from the age group of 40s up to 70s. If we make a comparison between Table 10 and Table 13, a serious policy issue needs to be raised and let us now illustrate this. While Table 10 suggests that beyond the age group of 30s the proportion of unemployed widows has shown an increasing trend, Table 13 suggests that beyond the same age group the proportion of widow-pensioner has shown a decreasing trend. This shows a contrasting picture. The older age groups have less ability to do heavy manual work, which results in higher unemployment rate among them. Hence, older age groups deserve special attention from the policy makers. But, most surprisingly, according to Table 13, 80 per cent widows of the age group of 60s and 93 per cent widows of the age group of 70s were found as non-widow-pensioners. In order to correct the situation, government's intervention is urgently needed. More money needs to be channeled through budgetary provisions for the sake of providing social security to this weaker section of the society. For this, the required resources can be generated through general taxation.

Why did the proportions of widow-pensioner go down with age? Higher rate of illiteracy in the old-age groups may be one good reason for this. The correlation between illiteracy and non-accessibility to widow pension is clearly prominent in our data. This relationship has been shown in Graph 2. In the age-groups of 20s and 30s, literacy rates are 30 per cent and 28 per cent respectively. In these two age groups, the proportions of widow-pensioners are relatively high. Beyond the age group of 30s, both the proportions of widow-pensioner and literacy went down (although not at the same rate). Age group 70s showed an exception, where the graph of literacy rate shows an increase relative to other post-30s age groups. One may wish to ignore such proportional relationship in the case of the age-group of 90s since only three samples were found in this age-group. In general, Graph 2 helps us to come up with a conclusion that illiteracy might have caused problems for the older age groups of widows in accessing full information about the Widow Pension Scheme and, accordingly, barred them to avail the benefit of the Scheme. Illiteracy among the widows should be seen to be a serious concern, since 87.5 per cent of the respondents have been found to be illiterate. A rigorous adult education programme needs to be undertaken in Rajasthan for the socio-economic development of the widows as well as the overall development of the poor. Otherwise, the government may find obstacles to publicize different welfare schemes among the mass people. Of course, we do not expect that the government will be able to eradicate the problem



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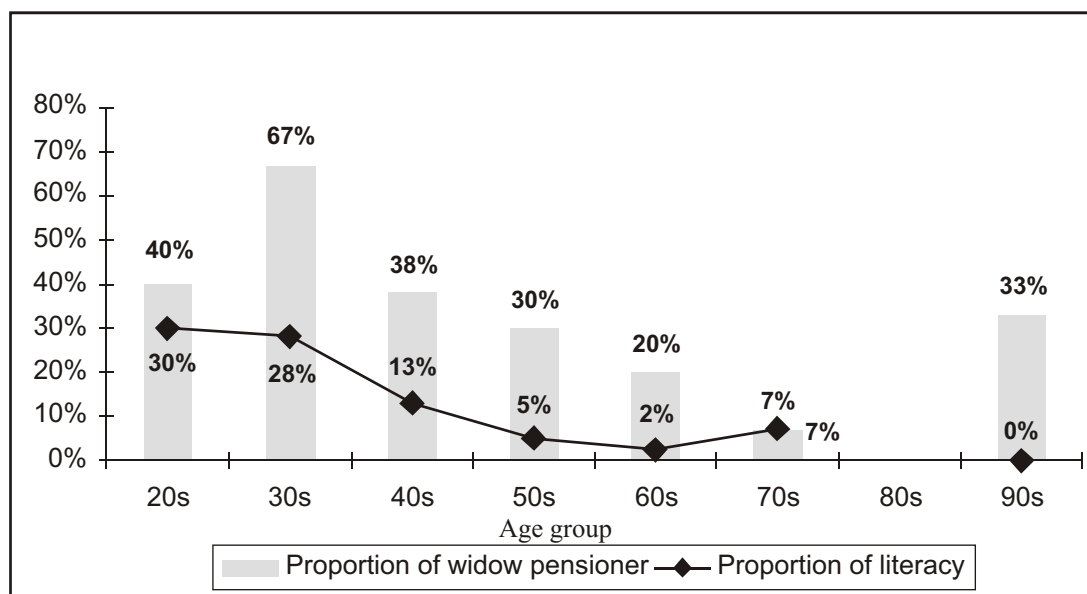
of illiteracy in a very short span of time, but there is nothing wrong with us in expecting that, given the constraint caused by illiteracy, the government can at least try to widely publicize the welfare schemes in villages through the local bodies, if they really want to.

**Table 13: Distribution of widow-pensioners according to age groups**

Age group	Whether received widow pension	Number of widows	Per cent
20s	yes	4	40%
	no	6	60%
	Total	10	100%
30s	yes	26	67%
	no	13	33%
	Total	39	100%
40s	yes	20	38%
	no	33	62%
	Total	53	100%
50s	yes	12	30%
	no	28	70%
	Total	40	100%
60s	yes	8	20%
	no	33	80%
	Total	41	100%
70s	yes	1	7%
	no	13	93%
	Total	14	100%
90s	yes	1	33%
	no	2	67%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100%</b>

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Graph 2: Proportions of widow-pensioners and literacy according to age groups



### 7.4 Nature of work, wage, and availability of work

In the present study, only six per cent widows have been found to be engaged in regular, formal, work such as Anganwari work, private job or teaching (see Table 14). The percentages of the last two are negligible. 48 per cent of widows are casual wage earners. According to our findings, this group is the majority among the widows in Rajasthan. Their earnings depend on the availability of work. The data on availability of work in a month are shown in Table 16. The second largest group is the unemployed group, the share of which is 36 per cent. 20.5 per cent of widows are engaged in farming. All of this group is not completely dependent on farming. Only 7 per cent widows are exclusively engaged in farming and the rest 13.5 per cent are also engaged in other occupation like casual work and formal job. This indicates that farming is not a source of sufficient income for a number of farmer-widows who have their own land. We will discuss the data on landholding of widows later in detail.

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**Table 14: Nature of work**

S. No.	Nature of work	Number of widows	Per cent
1.	Formal work • Anganwari worker • Private job • Para-teacher	12 • 10 • 1 • 1	6 • 5 • 0.5 • 0.5
2.	Casual wage earner (This mainly includes construction workers and agricultural labourers. In addition, there are workers who are engaged in sewing, school cleaning, job at <i>ata chakki</i> (small-scale flour mill), or as domestic-help etc.)	96	48
3.	Exclusively farming	14	7
4.	Both farming and other work (Here, "other work" overlaps with the item numbers 1 and 2 of this Table)	27	13.5
5.	Self-employed (other than farming) • Vegetable selling • Sewing	6 • 4 • 2	3 • 2 • 1
6.	No work	72	36
7.	<b>Total</b>	<b>200*</b>	<b>100*</b>

*Note:* \*Excluding serial number 4 in order to avoid double counting.

**Table 15: Wage earning per day**

Wage earning per day (in Rs.)	No. of widows	Per cent
10-20	20	10
21-30	32	16
31-40	26	13
41-50	20	10
51-60	12	6
Above 60	4	2
Exclusively farming	14	7
Unemployed	72	36
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 15 illustrates earnings of widows per day. Let us first give a definition of wage. 'Wage' includes daily earnings from work done by widows. Here, we also consider the earnings or salaries of regular workers (i.e. para-teacher or Anganwari worker) as 'wage' since such workers are not considered formal government employees who receive full benefits. Moreover, this group accounts for only 6 per cent of the total number of respondents (see serial number 1 of Table 14) and, furthermore, earnings from the regular/salaried work in which some widows have been found to be engaged are very modest. For instance, an Anganwari Assistant (i.e. *sahayika*) receives very nominal pay (e.g. less than Rs. 70 per day). Table 15 suggests that out of the working widows 10 per cent receive the lowest wage, i.e. only Rs. 10-20 per day, and 16 per cent receive only Rs. 21-30 per day. There are 31 per cent of widows who are found to be receiving wages higher than Rs. 30 per day. Now, one might think that at least 31 per cent widows are able to moderately lead their lives. However, Table 16

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depicts that only 11.5 per cent of widows are able to find work for 21-30 days in a month. Moreover, this group includes those 6 per cent widows who are engaged in formal employment (see Table 14). This means that, in informal sector, only 5.5 per cent widows are able to find work for 21 to 30 days in a month. The largest proportion (i.e. 25.5 per cent) of widows finds employment for 11-20 days a month. There are 17.5 per cent widows who are able to find work only for 1 to 10 days a month. The overall data of Table 16 depict that a large number of widows in Rajasthan are living in vulnerable condition since most of them are under the threat of economic insecurity due to the reason that wage employment is not always available for many widows for 30 days in a month. Besides, it would not be proper to think that all widows are physically able to work for 25-30 days in a month even if work is available. In most cases, casual work, in which a number of widows have been found to be engaged, involves heavy, laborious, physical, work. Such work is difficult to be rigorously carried out by a woman for 25 days a month, considering the harmful impact of such workload on her health. The age factor also needs to be considered. A widow of more than 30 years old might not be able to bear heavy, physical, workload even if she is offered such employment for 30 days a month.

**Table 16: Number of days of work available per month**

S. No.	No. of days of work available per month	No. of widows	Per cent
1.	Nil	72	36
2.	1-10 days	35	17.5
3.	11-20 days	51	25.5
4.	21-30 days	23	11.5
5.	Exclusively farming (Note: number of days of work is irrelevant)	14	7
6.	Both independent farming and waged/salaried work (Here, waged/salaried work overlaps with item numbers 2, 3, and 4 of this Table)	27	13.5
7.	Self-employed (other than farming)  Self-employed category includes those who are engaged in vegetable selling and sewing (Note: number of days of work is irrelevant)	5	2.5
8.	<b>Total</b>	<b>200*</b>	<b>100*</b>

Note: \*Excluding serial number 6 in order to avoid double counting

### 7.5 Housing

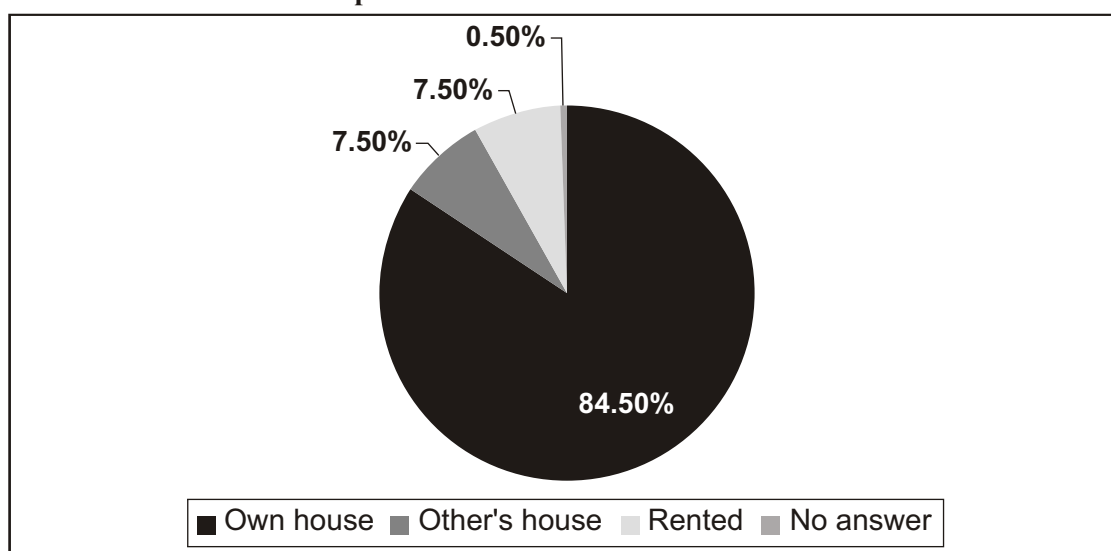
How many widows do own a house? Of 200 widows, 169 respondents, i.e. 84.5 per cent, were found to own their house. 7.5 per cent said that they did not have their own house and they were living in others' houses (e.g. their relations). Of the total number of respondents, 7.5 per cent of widows were found to be living in rented house. And 0.5 per cent of widows did not answer the question related to housing (see Graph 3 and Table 17).

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**Table 17 : Where does the widow live?**

Where does the widow live?	Number of widows	Per cent
Own house	169	84.50
Other's house	15	7.50
Rented house	15	7.50
No answer	1	0.50
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Graph 3: Do the widows have own house?**



As mentioned, out of the total number of respondents 169 widows were found to own their own house. Of 169 widows, 64 widows were found to have *pucca* houses (concrete house) and 105 widows were found to have *kutcha* houses (non-concrete house). Table 18 distinctly presents a break-up of those widows (i.e. 84.5 per cent of the total number of respondents) who have their own house -- either *kutcha* or *pucca*. Table 18 suggests that 32 per cent widows have *pucca* houses, 52.5 per cent widows live in *kutcha* house, and the break-up of the residual 15.5 per cent has already been given in Table 17. The figures indicate that a substantial number of widows need support for making their *pucca* houses. There is a scheme for providing such support to the rural poor, which is called "Indira Awas Yojna". It is a centrally sponsored scheme (CSS) in which the proportions of contributions of Central Govt. and State Govt. are 75 per cent and 25 per cent respectively. See Box 2 for the details of Indira Awas Yojna.

**Table 18 : Data related to *pucca* and *kutcha* house**

<i>Pucca / Kutcha</i> House	Number of widows	Per cent
<i>Pucca</i> house	64	32
<i>Kutcha</i> house	105	52.5
Other	31	15.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

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### Box 2: Indira Awas Yojna

The Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) provides free houses to the rural poor. The ceiling on construction assistance has been set at Rs. 25,000 per unit for the plain areas and Rs. 27,500 for the hilly/difficult areas. Sixty per cent of the houses are provided to the scheduled caste (SC) and scheduled tribe (ST) families who are below the poverty line (BPL); the other BPL families account for the remaining 40 per cent of the houses.

Since there was an acute need for upgradation of unserviceable *kutcha* houses in the rural areas, it has been stipulated that up to 20 per cent the total fund can be utilised for conversion of unserviceable *kutcha* houses into *pucca/semi-pucca* houses and, accordingly, for providing subsidy to the beneficiary availing loan under the credit-cum-subsidy scheme. The credit-cum-subsidy scheme targets rural families with annual income up to Rs. 32,000. While subsidy is restricted to Rs.12,500 the maximum loan amount that can be availed of is an amount of Rs. 50,000.

The programme stipulates that the dwelling units should invariably be allotted in the name of a female member of the beneficiary household. Alternatively, it can be allotted in the name of both husband and wife. Construction of the house is the sole responsibility of the beneficiary. Engagement of contractors is strictly prohibited. No specific design has been stipulated for IAY houses, the choice of design, technology and materials for construction being left to the discretion of the beneficiaries.

How many widows know about the Indira Awas Yojna (IAY)? Well, the government launched the Scheme, but the information did not widely reach the poor widows. Of those widows who have *kutcha* houses, as many as 90.5 per cent (i.e. 95 widows) do not even know about the Scheme, whereas it is evident from Box 2 that the primary objective of the Scheme is to strengthen the condition of women in the society. To meet the objective, this Scheme should have been well publicised in the rural areas, but that has not been done. Widows are one of the most vulnerable sections of the society; and since the information of this Scheme has failed to widely reach the poor widows, it simply exposes a big lacuna in the system. It also exposes apathy of both the elected representatives of this democracy and bureaucrats towards implementation of the welfare schemes meant for the benefit of the poor women. Such apathy towards poor women not only exists at the top level of our bureaucracy and political sphere but also exists at the middle and bottom levels. Otherwise, such a finding relating to the Indira Awas Yojna would not come up in this study.

What about those widows who knew about the Indira Awas Yojna? Only 10 widows, who have *kutcha* house, knew about the Scheme. Of these 10 widows, 5 widows applied for the benefit and other 5 did not. Finally, only two widows were found to have received money under this Scheme and the total amount of the grant was of about Rs. 15,000 per widow.

Some of the respondents who applied for the IAY grant but did not receive any benefit complained that they were deprived of this benefit since they were not enlisted in the BPL category although they felt that their daily survival was under threat. Such complaints need to be seriously considered since civil society organisations found several cases which proved that a number of rural elites were enlisted as BPL while the real poor were left out. Another complaint was received from the widows who felt that they were eligible for receiving the IAY benefits but the panchayat chiefs remained uncooperative towards them.

### 7.6 Are vulnerable widows included in the BPL, or receiving widow pension?

In the present study, 35.5 per cent widows were found to belong to the BPL category and 64.5 per cent were non-BPL (see Table 19). As far as BPL and non-BPL issues are concerned, will be presenting more elaborated pictures in Tables 20, 21 and 24.

**Table 19: Does your family belong to BPL?**

	Number	%
yes	71	35.50
no	129	64.50
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Almost 50% of the BPL widows were found to be widow non-pensioners (see Table 20). Since they are in the BPL category they deserve to receive widow pension. It is evident from Table 20 that 72% of the non-BPL widows do not receive widow pension.

**Table 20: BPL/ non-BPL widows vis-à-vis widow pensioners/non-pensioners**

	BPL	%	non-BPL	%
Widow pensioner	36	50.70	36	27.91
Widow non-pensioner	35	<b>49.30</b>	93	<b>72.09</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	100.00	<b>129</b>	100.00

But how could one prove that many of the non-BPL widows are also in vulnerable condition? Landlessness is considered as another important parameter to measure a widow's vulnerability. From this perspective we will discuss the widows' conditions at length.

#### **Landholding**

Let us look at Table 21 which depicts that about 78% non-BPL widows do not have land (this includes those who have unirrigated lands and whose lands are occupied by others; we will elaborate this later). Hence, a number of non-BPL widows are also very poor and are be in need of social security. For further illustration, see Table 24.

**Table 21: Landholding vis-à-vis BPL/ non-BPL**

Landholding	BPL	%	Non-BPL	%
No. of landholding widows*	13	18.3	28	21.7
Other	58	81.7	101	78.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>100</b>

*Note:* \*Excluding unirrigated landholders and those widows whose lands are occupied by others (we will elaborate this later). In this Table, they are included in the 'other' category.

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Table 22 suggests that there are 55 per cent widows who are landless in our study area. Although 45 per cent widows have their own land, only 20.5 per cent widows have been found to be benefiting from their land since they are the sole owners of irrigated land. Another 6 per cent of widows do own irrigated land but their land or produces are occupied by others such as brother-in-law (husband's brother), son, son of brother-in-law, moneylender etc. Why moneylenders? Sometimes widows borrow money from the village moneylenders at high rate of interest, leaving their lands to the moneylenders as mortgage. In such case, moneylenders cultivate the land and take its produce.

**Table 22 : Agricultural landholding**

Status	Number	Per cent
Landless	110	55
Owner of unirrigated land (almost nil production)	37	18.5
Owner of irrigated land, but crops produced and/or land occupied by other	12	6
Sole owner of irrigated land	41	20.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

A further break-up is given in Table 23 where irrigated landholding has been divided into four categories: (1) marginal farmers; (2) small farmers; (3) medium farmers; and (4) large farmers. No widow belonging to the group of large farmers was found in the study area whereas the proportions of marginal, small and medium farmers are 11 per cent, 7.5 per cent and 2 per cent respectively.

**Table 23 : Agricultural land holding  
(marginal, small and medium farmers)**

Status	Number	Per cent
Landless	110	55
Owner of unirrigated land (almost nil production)	37	18.5
Owner of irrigated land, but crops produced and/or land occupied by other	12	6
Marginal farmer (0>land*4)	22	11
Small farmer (4>land*8)	15	7.5
Medium farmer (8>land*40)	4	2
Large farmer (land*>40)	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: \*Land in *bigha* [In Rajasthan, 1 hectare = approximately 4 *bigha* of land]



## The Destitution of Widows in Rajasthan

Table 24 suggests that 35.5 per cent of widows belong to the below-the-poverty-line (BPL) category and 64.5 per cent belong to the non-BPL category. Moreover, the proportion of the landless widows of the non-BPL category is considerably higher than that of the BPL category. It is surprising that a large proportion of landless widows belong to the non-BPL category. Since landlessness is a key indicator of vulnerability, most of the landless widows, if not all, deserve to be included in the BPL category. Through their inclusion in the BPL, they will be eligible to receive a number of public facilities either at subsidised rate or free of cost. For instance, in Rajasthan a BPL cardholder is eligible to receive grains of up to 35 kgs per month at the rates of Rs. 4.70 per kg for wheat, Rs. 6.30 per kg for rice, etc.<sup>10</sup> Table 24 depicts that nearly 10 per cent of widows who have unirrigated land are in the non-BPL category, whereas these widows need to be included into the BPL category since they are unable to produce any crop in the land in absence of irrigation facilities. And they can not afford expensive irrigation. Moreover, given the financial constraints, the widows also lack entrepreneurial skills that can sometimes overshadow financial shortfall and help one to win. Table 24 also suggests that about 9 per cent widows who are marginal farmers are left out of the BPL category.

**Table 24: Distribution of BPL/Non-BPL widows according to the landholding status<sup>#</sup>**

BPL/ non-BPL	Landless	Owner of unirrigated land (almost nil production)	Owner of irrigated land, but crops pro- duced and/or land occupied by other	Marginal farmer (0>land*4)	Small farmer (4>land*8)	Medium farmer (8>land*40)	TOTAL
BPL	36 (18)	18 (9)	4 (2)	5 (2.5)	7 (3.5)	1 (0.5)	71 (35.5)
Non-BPL	74 (37)	19 (9.5)	8 (4)	17 (8.5)	8 (4)	3 (1.5)	129 (64.5)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>110 (55)</b>	<b>37 (18.5)</b>	<b>12 (6)</b>	<b>22 (11)</b>	<b>15 (7.5)</b>	<b>4 (2)</b>	<b>200 (100)</b>

Notes: <sup>#</sup>Percentages are in parentheses

\*Land in *bigha* [In Rajasthan, 1 hectare = approximately 4 *bigha* of land]

Now let us turn to an important question. Are the vulnerable widows provided with social security that is exclusively meant for them? Table 25 presents us a picture. Among the total number of respondents 55 per cent have been found as landless widows, the composition of which is as follows: 21 per cent are widow-pensioners and 34 per cent are non-pensioners, whereas the latter deserve to be receiving widow pension since they do not possess any productive resource such as irrigated land. As far as the widows, who have unirrigated or arid land, are concerned the proportion of widow non-pensioners is about double of that of widow-pensioners. It is evident from Table 25 that 5 per cent of widows, who are owners of irrigated land but whose crops are taken by others, have been found as non-pensioner. These widows have land but they are virtually unable to make use of their means of production for their own benefit. Since these widows are deprived of their resources, they need state support to survive. Earlier, we have found in Table 24 that there are 4 per cent of widows who are deprived of their resources and simultaneously left out of the BPL category. Although in a real sense these widows do not have control over their cultivable land, they hardly have strong evidence to

<sup>10</sup> BPL families are also eligible to receive kerosene at Rs. 10 per litre and sugar at Rs. 13.50 per kg, among other facilities.

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prove their vulnerability at the time when their properties are officially registered in their names.

Are the widowed small and marginal farmers receiving widow pension? Let us again take a look at Table 25. In the case of small farmers, the proportion of widow non-pensioners is higher than that of widow pensioners and in the case of marginal farmers, the situation is roughly similar. Social securities should be provided to the widows who are in great need of it.

**Table 25 : Distribution of widow-pensioners and widow non-pensioners according to the landholding status<sup>#</sup>**

Widow pensioner and non-pensioner	Landless	Owner of unirrigated land (almost nil production)	Owner of irrigated land, but crops produced and/or land occupied by other	Marginal farmer (0>land*4)	Small farmer (4>land*8)	Medium farmer (8>land*40)	TOTAL
Widow-pensioner	42 (21)	12 (6)	2 (1)	8 (4)	6 (3)	2 (1)	72 (36)
(35.5)Widow non-pensioner	68 (34)	24 (12)	10 (5)	14 (7)	10 (5)	2 (1)	128 (64)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>110 (55)</b>	<b>36 (18)</b>	<b>12 (6)</b>	<b>22 (11)</b>	<b>16 (8)</b>	<b>4 (2)</b>	<b>200 (100)</b>

Notes: <sup>#</sup>Percentages are in parentheses

\*Land in *bigha* [In Rajasthan, 1 hectare = approximately 4 *bigha* of land]

In the present study, the proportions of samples in rural and urban areas are 90 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. As Table 26 suggests, among rural widows 51.7 per cent are landless, 20.6 per cent are owners of unirrigated or arid land, 6.1 per cent are owners of arable or irrigated land but their lands are occupied by others, and 21.7 per cent are sole owners of irrigated land. The break-up of the last group is given in Table 27 from which it is clear that in rural Rajasthan marginal and small farmers constitute a major share among the landowning widows. A substantial part of Rajasthan is desert area and, moreover, it is a drought prone state. Those who have arable land are dependent on rain water for growing crops. While even in a year of good monsoon marginal and small farmers have to look for alternative sources of income to maintain their subsistence level, their conditions become miserable in a year of drought. So, the widows who are regarded as small and marginal farmers are also in need of social security.

**Table 26 : Agricultural landholding (rural and urban)**

Status	RURAL		URBAN	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Landless	93	51.7	17	85
Owner of unirrigated land (almost nil production)	37	20.6	0	0
Owner of irrigated land, but crops produced and/or land occupied by other	11	6.1	1	5
Sole owner of irrigated land	39	21.7	2	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>

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**Table 27 : Agricultural landholding -- marginal, small and medium farmers (rural and urban)**

Status	RURAL		URBAN	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Landless	93	51.7	17	85
Owner of unirrigated land (almost nil production)	37	20.6	0	0
Owner of irrigated land, but crops produced and/or land occupied by other	11	6.1	1	5
Marginal farmer (0>land*4)	20	11.1	2	10
Small farmer (4>land*8)	15	8.3	0	0
Medium farmer (8>land*40)	4	2.2	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: \*Land in *bigha* [In Rajasthan, 1 hectare = approximately 4 *bigha* of land]

Now, let us examine accessibility of widows to the social security through BPL facilities and widow pension in the rural and urban areas separately.

In rural areas, as Table 28 represents, 37.2 per cent widows are found in the BPL category and 62.8 per cent are found in the non-BPL category. As far as landless widows are concerned, the proportions of BPL and non-BPL widows are 17.8 per cent and 33.9 per cent respectively. The latter is the most vulnerable section among the rural widows, since they neither have access to land resource, nor do they have access to BPL facilities through the public distribution system. Of the owners of unirrigated land, almost 50 per cent are left out of BPL category. A large proportion of marginal farmers are also not included in the BPL category.

**Table 28 : Distribution of BPL/Non-BPL widows according to the landholding status (Rural and Urban) #**

Region	BPL/ Non-BPL	Landless	Owner of unirrigated land (almost nil production)	Owner of irrigated land, but crops produced and/or land occupied by other	Marginal farmer (0>land*4)	Small farmer (4>land*8)	Medium farmer (8>land*40)	TOTAL
RURAL	BPL	32 (17.8)	18 (10)	4 (2.2)	5 (2.8)	7 (3.9)	1 (0.6)	67 (37.2)
	Non-BPL	61 (33.9)	19 (10.6)	7 (3.9)	15 (8.3)	8 (4.4)	3 (1.7)	113 (62.8)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>93 (51.7)</b>	<b>37 (20.6)</b>	<b>11 (6.1)</b>	<b>20 (11.1)</b>	<b>15 (8.3)</b>	<b>4 (2.2)</b>	<b>180 (100)</b>
URBAN	BPL	4 (20)	0	0	0	0	0	4 (20)
	Non-BPL	13 (65)	0	1 (5)	2 (10)	0	0	16 (80)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17 (85)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1 (5)</b>	<b>2 (10)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>20 (100)</b>

Notes: #Percentages are in parentheses

\*Land in *bigha* [In Rajasthan, 1 hectare = approximately 4 *bigha* of land]

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We have seen in Table 28 that landholding in urban region is not an important phenomenon. So, in Table 29 only the rural data are presented. In the rural areas, we observe that more than 65 per cent of the landless widows are not included in the BPL category. Among those who have unirrigated land, about 51 per cent are left out of the BPL category. A substantial proportion of the widows whose lands are occupied by others are also deprived of the BPL facilities. It is also observed that 75 per cent of the marginal farmers are out of the BPL category.

Similarly, Table 30 depicts that greater proportions of vulnerable widows (i.e. landless etc.) are deprived of widow pension.

**Table 29 : Distribution of BPL/Non-BPL widows according to the landholding status (Rural and Urban) #**

Region	BPL/ Non-BPL	Landless	Owner of unirrigated land (almost nil production)	Owner of irrigated land, but crops produced and/or land occupied by other	Marginal farmer (0>land*4)	Small farmer (4>land*8)	Medium farmer (8>land*40)	TOTAL
RURAL	BPL	32 (34.4)	18 (48.6)	4 (36.4)	5 (25)	7 (46.7)	1 (25)	67 (37.2)
	Non-BPL	61 (65.6)	19 (51.4)	7 (63.6)	15 (75)	8 (53.3)	3 (75)	113 (62.8)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>93 (100)</b>	<b>37 (100)</b>	<b>11 (100)</b>	<b>20 (100)</b>	<b>15 (100)</b>	<b>4 (100)</b>	<b>180 (100)</b>

Notes: #Percentages are in parentheses

\*Land in *bigha* [In Rajasthan, 1 hectare = approximately 4 *bigha* of land]

**Table 30: Distribution of widow-pensioners and widow non-pensioners according to the landholding status (Rural) #**

Region	Widow pensioner and non- pensioner	Landless	Owner of unirrigated land (almost nil production)	Owner of irrigated land, but crops produced and/or land occupied by other	Marginal farmer (0>land*4)	Small farmer (4>land*8)	Medium farmer (8>land*40)	TOTAL
RURAL	Widow- pensioner	37 (39.8)	12 (32.4)	2 (18.2)	7 (35)	5 (33.3)	2 (50)	65 (36.1)
	Widow non-pensioner	56 (60.2)	25 (67.6)	9 (81.8)	13 (65)	10 (66.7)	2 (50)	115 (63.9)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>93 (100)</b>	<b>37 (100)</b>	<b>11 (100)</b>	<b>20 (100)</b>	<b>15 (100)</b>	<b>4 (100)</b>	<b>180 (100)</b>

Notes: #Percentages are in parentheses

\*Land in *bigha* [In Rajasthan, 1 hectare = approximately 4 *bigha* of land]

## The Destitution of Widows in Rajasthan

### *Unirrigated landholding*

The poor people who have unirrigated land in Rajasthan find it very expensive to cultivate their lands and grow crops and in most cases they remain unable to produce anything. Monsoon does not often timely occur in this region of the country and also rain water is not sufficiently available across this region. Table 31 presents the districtwise distribution of unirrigated landholding among our samples. We observe that 41.1 per cent of the total number of landholding widows have unirrigated land (see the 'note' of Table 31 for further clarification). The objective of presenting this data is to find the districts where the numbers of unirrigated landholding widows are relatively high and consequently to help policymakers as well as concerned people to give importance in this matter. Although western Rajasthan is mostly desert area, other districts are also affected by frequent droughts. All the western Rajasthan districts have not been covered in our survey. Of the districts we covered in Rajasthan, three districts, viz. Churu, Bhilwara and Nagaur, have been found to be those of high concentration of unirrigated landholders. In Ajmer, we did not find even one because surveys in Ajmer mainly covered the urban areas. But, existence of no unirrigated landholder among our sample in Swaimadhopur district is a little surprising. Along with social security, support to promote alternative livelihoods, e.g. animal husbandry, artisanal work etc., needs to be provided

**Table 31: Districtwise distribution of unirrigated landholders**

District	Number of widow	Per cent*
Alwar	1	1.1
Churu	16	17.8
Jhalawar	1	1.1
Bhilwara	10	11.1
Dungarpur	2	2.2
Nagaur	7	7.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>41.1</b>

*Note:* \*percentage relative to the total number of landowning widows (i.e. 90), including all landowners (i.e. irrigated landowners, unirrigated landowners and those irrigated landowners whose lands are occupied by others).

### *Districtwise distribution of widows*

Let us take a look at the districtwise data. Table 32 suggests that, out of the total number of landless widows in Ajmer district, about 79 per cent are left out of the BPL category. It is a little wondering to note that 100 per cent landless widows have been found in the non-BPL category in the district of Swaimadhopur, which is followed by the district of Bhilwara. The proportions of landless widows who are belonging to the non-BPL category are higher than that belonging to the BPL category in the other districts too, excepting in Churu and Dungarpur. As seen in Table 33, the proportion of widow-pensioners who belong to the landless category in Churu district is also impressive. But, in this connection, the situation is the worst in Dungarpur. But, surprisingly, in the same district (i.e. in Dungarpur), the proportions of marginal and small farmers who are receiving widow pension are higher than those who are not receiving pension.

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**Table 32: District wise distribution of BPL/Non-BPL widows according to the landholding status<sup>#</sup>**

District	BPL/ non-BPL	Landless	Owner of unirrigated land (almost nil production)	Owner of irrigated land, but crops produced and/or land occupied by other	Marginal farmer (0>land*4)	Small farmer (4>land*8)	Medium farmer (8>land*40)	TOTAL
Ajmer	BPL	4 (21.1)	0	1 (50)	0	0	0	5 (20)
	Non-BPL	15 (78.9)	0	1 (50)	3 (100)	1 (100)	0	20 (80)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	19 (100)	0	2(100)	3 (100)	1 (100)	0	25 (100)
Swai- madhopur	BPL	0	0	1 (25)	0	0	0	1 (4)
	Non-BPL	14 (100)	0	3 (75)	4 (100)	3 (100)	0	24 (96)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	14 (100)	0	4 (100)	4 (100)	3 (100)	0	25 (100)
Alwar	BPL	5 (31.3)	0	0	0	0	0	5 (20)
	Non-BPL	11 (68.8)	1 (100)	1 (100)	6 (100)	1 (100)	0	20 (80)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	16 (100)	1 (100)	1 (100)	6 (100)	1 (100)	0	25 (100)
Churu	BPL	7 (77.8)	7 (43.8)	0	0	0	0	14 (56)
	Non-BPL	2 (22.2)	9 (56.2)	0	0	0	0	11 (44)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	9 (100)	16 (100)	0	0	0	0	25 (100)
Jhalawar	BPL	5 (38.5)	0	1 (33.3)	0	2 (40)	1 (50)	9 (36)
	Non-BPL	8 (61.5)	1 (100)	2 (66.7)	1 (100)	3 (60)	1 (50)	16 (64)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	13 (100)	1 (100)	3 (100)	1 (100)	5 (100)	2 (100)	25 (100)
Bhilwara	BPL	1 (9.1)	8 (80)	0	1 (33.3)	0	0	10 (40)
	Non-BPL	10 (90.9)	2 (20)	1 (100)	2 (66.7)	0	0	15 (60)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	11 (100)	10 (100)	1 (100)	3 (100)	0	0	25 (100)
Dungarpur	BPL	6 (60)	2 (100)	1 (100)	4 (80)	5 (100)	0	18 (72)
	Non-BPL	4 (40)	0	0	1 (20)	0	2 (100)	7 (28)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	10 (100)	2 (100)	1 (100)	5 (100)	5 (100)	2 (100)	25 (100)
Nagaur	BPL	7 (38.9)	1 (14.3)	0	0	0	0	8 (32)
	Non-BPL	11 (61.1)	6 (85.7)	0	0	0	0	17 (68)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	18 (100)	7 (100)	0	0	0	0	25 (100)

Notes: <sup>#</sup>Percentages are in parentheses

\*Land in *bigha* [In Rajasthan, 1 hectare = approximately 4 *bigha* of land]

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**Table 33: Districtwise distribution of widow pensioners and widow non-pensioners according to the landholding status<sup>#</sup>**

District	BPL/ non-BPL	Landless	Owner of unirrigated land (almost nil production)	Owner of irrigated land, but crops produced and/or land occupied by other	Marginal farmer (0>land*4)	Small farmer (4>land*8)	Medium farmer (8>land*40)	TOTAL
Ajmer	Widow pensioner	7 (36.8)	0	0	2 (66.7)	0	0	9 (36)
	Widow non-pensioner	12 (63.2)	0	2 (100)	1 (33.3)	1 (100)	0	16 (64)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	19 (100)	0	2 (100)	3 (100)	1 (100)	0	25 (100)
Swai- madhopur	Widow pensioner	5 (35.7)	0	0	1 (25)	0	0	6 (24)
	Widow non-pensioner	9 (64.3)	0	4 (100)	3 (75)	3 (100)	0	19 (76)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	14 (100)	0	4 (100)	4 (100)	3 (100)	0	25 (100)
Alwar	Widow pensioner	7 (43.8)	0	0	1 (16.7)	0	0	8 (32)
	Widow non-pensioner	9 (56.3)	1 (100)	1 (100)	5 (83.3)	1 (100)	0	17 (68)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	16 (100)	1 (100)	1 (100)	6 (100)	1 (100)	0	25 (100)
Churu	Widow pensioner	5 (55.6)	8 (50)	0	0	0	0	13 (52)
	Widow non-pensioner	4 (44.4)	8 (50)	0	0	0	0	12 (48)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	9 (100)	16 (100)	0	0	0	0	25 (100)
Jhalawar	Widow pensioner	6 (46.2)	0	1 (33.3)	0	1 (20)	1 (50)	9 (36)
	Widow non-pensioner	7 (53.8)	1 (100)	2 (66.7)	1 (100)	4 (80)	1 (50)	16 (64)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	13 (100)	1 (100)	3 (100)	1 (100)	5 (100)	2 (100)	25 (100)
Bhilwara	Widow pensioner	2 (18.2)	2 (20)	0	1 (33.3)	0	0	5 (20)
	Widow non-pensioner	9 (81.8)	8 (80)	1 (100)	2 (66.7)	0	0	20 (80)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	11 (100)	10 (100)	1 (100)	3 (100)	0	0	25 (100)
Dungarpur	Widow pensioner	1 (10)	0	1 (100)	3 (60)	4 (80)	1 (50)	10 (40)
	Widow non-pensioner	9 (90)	2 (100)	0	2 (40)	1 (20)	1 (50)	15 (60)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	10 (100)	2 (100)	1 (100)	5 (100)	5 (100)	2 (100)	25 (100)
Nagaur	Widow pensioner	9 (50)	2 (28.6)	0	0	0	0	11 (44)
	Widow non-pensioner	9 (50)	5 (71.4)	0	0	0	0	14 (56)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	18 (100)	7 (100)	0	0	0	0	25 (100)

Notes: <sup>#</sup>Percentages are in parentheses

\*Land in *bigha* [In Rajasthan, 1 hectare = approximately 4 *bigha* of land]

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### Conclusions

There are about 16 lakh widows in the state, but the Government has budgeted to provide widow pension to a little more than 2 lakh widows. Although all widows are not poor, a substantial number of them are living in destitute condition. There are quite a number of widows who are landless in Rajasthan. If we include those widows who have unirrigated land and whose lands or produces are occupied by others then the number of vulnerable widows goes up. Some may argue in favour of considering the small and marginal farmers too as the vulnerable ones and there is nothing wrong in considering so. Most of the widows are suffering from the lack of basic needs and a large proportion of widows are living outside of the safety net. State support through social securities might improve their quality of life. For them, state support is essential since due to lack of skill most of them are unable to find gainful employment. They also need to be provided with education and training, but initially what they urgently need is basic support for the sake of their survival as well as dignity. The widow pension of Rs. 250 per widow per month is too little to meet the basic needs. This amount needs to be enhanced, and at the same time a much greater number of widows need to be covered with the safety net of social security. Providing the widows only with a BPL card will simply not improve their condition since several BPL facilities are not available at free of cost. They need both the BPL facilities and widow pension, among others.



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