

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR SUPPORTING CHILD WIDOWS

A Research Study:
Child Widows' Needs and
How to Support Them
by Mohinder Watson, PhD, MPH
Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage
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Action on Child
Early and Forced Marriage





Report Author Mohinder Watson, PhD, MPH. Founder, Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage (ACE&FM), Geneva, and Main UN Geneva Representative, International Council of Women.

This document is available at: Actiononchildearlyandforcedmarriage.org
Email contact: actiononchildmarriage@gmail.com

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The following acronyms will be used throughout this summary report:

ACE&FM Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage
CEDAW Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRC Convention on the Rights of the Child
HRC the Human Rights Council
ICCPR the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESR the International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights
SDGs Sustainable Development Goals
SR Special Rapporteur
UPR Universal Periodic Review

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An estimated 1.36 million child widows—girls who marry early and are widowed before the age of 18—survive in many countries as a neglected, vulnerable and forgotten group. Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage (ACE&FM) conducted a survey to determine the general level of awareness of the plight of child widows, their needs and how to support them, among stakeholders working on women’s and girls’ human rights and development, UN agencies, faith-based organisations, NGOs, human rights commissions, researchers and parliamentarians.

From the 85 questionnaires distributed, 42 were returned from 22 countries: Afghanistan, Member of the European Parliament, Belgium, Cameroon, Canada, Democratic Republic of Congo, France, Ghana, India, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Nepal, Nigeria, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda and UK. Further data was received from Cameroon, Canada, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria, the Philippines, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago and Uganda from a website for social activists. The findings indicate that many stakeholders know little about child widows although some were aware of their existence.

This could be attributed to the small number of child widows who are scattered within their communities, the illegality of child marriage and because child widows often keep their widow status a secret out of fear that disclosure might jeopardise their chances of re-marriage, and others are simply not allowed to speak out.

Child widows have both immediate and long-term needs which range from safety, food, shelter and clothing to re-integration into society through education and vocational skills training to become financially independent. They need health services, including reproductive health services, access to justice and legal services, psychological counselling, social security and education on parenting skills for mothers. However, financial and material support are insufficient, and child widows also need self-empowerment, social acceptance, nurturing, friendship, spiritual guidance, emotional support, a sense of belonging to a family and community and to live in dignity, free from discrimination and violence.

A human rights-based approach involving *all* UN treaty bodies is essential to support child widows because some may lose protection under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) through early marriage, as regardless of age, they are often considered to have attained majority. However, child widows are still children with different needs from adults, such as access to recreational facilities to enjoy their fundamental right to play, an integral part of childhood learning and development. Although the Sustainable Development Goals espouse the principle of “leave no one behind,” child widows have been ignored for decades. This research is the first to provide guidance on action that should be taken at the international, national and local levels to support child widows.

When given the right support, a child widow can become a powerful catalyst for change, bringing immense benefits to her community and can alter her own life journey from child bride to child widow, to finding her own identity, realizing her potential and reclaiming her childhood.

Report author: Mohinder Watson, PhD MPH, Founder, Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage and UN Geneva Main Representative International Council of Women.

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This literature overview covers the topic of child widows within the broader context of widows. Widowhood can occur at any age and is a worldwide issue as most women who marry are likely to spend some part of their lives as widows.

In his message for International Widows Day on June 23, 2014, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon stated: “No woman should lose her status, livelihood or property when her husband dies, yet millions of widows in our world face persistent abuse, discrimination, disinheritance and destitution....”

While Ban Ki-moon described some of the many adverse consequences faced by the 258 million widows around the world upon the death of their husband, he failed to mention the important fact that widows can be of all ages, not just elderly but also young mothers and even child widows (Loomba Foundation, 2015; Owen, 1996, 2002). In fact, many of the older widows portrayed in the media living in the Holy Cities of India, who are now in their seventies, were often widowed as young children, and thus a life-course approach to widowhood is paramount (Owen, 1996; Giri, 2002).

2.2 Definitions

For the purpose of this study, a widow is defined as a woman who has been married and whose husband has died, and she has not re-married. However, even the definition of ‘widowhood’ can be contentious as some women may believe they are married, but upon the death of their husband they find that they were not married at all, or even that their deceased husband had another family of which the widow was unaware. She then becomes a co-widow, and the other wife may lay sole claim to his inheritance. An added factor to this ambiguity is that couples who live together for over two years outside of marriage are, in some countries, considered married, as in Tanzania (Owen, 1996; Magoke-Mhoja, 2006), thus blurring the boundaries between married women and widows.

Currently there is no standard definition of a child widow. This is due in part to the many cultural interpretations of childhood and the age at which a girl is no longer a child, with some cultures marking this transition at puberty (the start of menstruation) (UNICEF, 2001). However, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the most ratified international instrument concerning the rights of the child, defines a child as anyone under the age of 18, which is the definition used in this study.

2.3 Notes on the selection of material

It must be stated that there is very limited literature on child widows, as already recognised by leading authors such as Margaret Owen and Monica Magoke-Mhoja. Given the scarcity of the literature, the experiences of child widows will be considered in the broader context of all widows.

Since child widows are a consequence of child marriage which is most prevalent in Sub Saharan Africa and South East Asia, the focus of the literature will be in these regions. This overview is not an exhaustive list; rather it aims to provide a background in which to locate these findings. It will initially cover aspects of widowhood that commonly impact widows’ life experiences and then focus on child widows. Only English literature has been consulted.

2.4 Prevalence of widows and the need for a life-course approach

There are about 258 million widows in the world today (Loomba Foundation, 2015). ACE&FM (2018) estimates there are over a million child widows in this group. While the number of widows is already large, this number is increasing due to armed conflict, HIV/AIDS, fundamentalism, ethnic cleansing, genocide, polygamy and child marriage (Owen, 1996; Women, 2001). The lives of widows vary as societies have different cultures, values and social structures which influence customs such as marriage, re-marriage and mourning rituals.

Potash remarked that although Western societies often associate widowhood with age, widowhood depends very much on the marriage system. For example, in parts of Africa where it is common for girls to marry much older men, it is inevitable that many African women will become widowed at a relatively young age (Potash, 1986).

2.5 The institution of marriage

Marriage is the fundamental unit of family in almost every culture, but the institution of marriage and the rules surrounding it differ according to various customs. The Oxford English Dictionary defines marriage as “the legally or formally recognised union of two people as partners in a personal relationship.” How marriage partners are selected, the age at which girls marry, the reasons for marriage, the way marriage ceremonies are conducted as well as the role of the husband and wife within the marriage partnership vary among cultures and change over time.

While ‘love marriages’ are common in Western countries where the spouses themselves form relationships and eventually marry their partner, this system is unacceptable within some cultures where sex outside of marriage is strictly forbidden. In such societies, parents prefer to arrange the marriage of their daughters at an early age for a variety of reasons, including poverty, protection from sexual violence, and out of fear that girls may enter into relationships on their own. The expectation that girls should be virgins at marriage, fear of pregnancy outside of marriage and preservation of the family honour are further factors (UNICEF, 2001; Sagade, 2005; Nirantar Trust, 2015). As poverty is often a contributing factor in child marriage, financial transactions can also influence the age of marriage. In Asian cultures, the dowry payment for a younger girl may be lower than for an older one, and in some African societies, the bride price paid to the girl’s family is higher for a younger girl, thus providing economic incentives for poor families to marry girls early. Furthermore, many societies still fail to see the value of educating girls, believing it will only benefit the in-laws and hence not a worthwhile investment (HAQ Centre for Human Rights, 2014).

Ahmed-Ghosh (2009) remarked that, while recent studies have focused on the plight of widows in India, the restrictions imposed by the cultural control over women’s sexuality and their lives have not been adequately addressed. Ahmed-Ghosh argues that the defining of women’s identity primarily through sexuality is not just about patriarchal control, but it perpetuates and legitimizes male power over women. Under this system, a woman’s sexuality is used to control her first through marriage with the requirement to be a virgin and later during widowhood when she may be forced into a levirate union or denied the possibility of re-marriage.

2.6 Child marriage

The CRC states that anyone under 18 is a child and considered too young to give his or her consent to marriage. Hence child marriage, where one or both spouses are under the age of 18, is a violation of human rights. However, child marriage has been practiced for centuries and is difficult to change as it is deeply embedded in certain communities (UNICEF, 2001; HAQ, 2014).

In societies where child marriage is common, patriarchal structures tend to prevail. Men make most of the decisions on behalf of all the family members, including decisions concerning their daughters who themselves are often given little choice in their marriage partner. Badhwar et al. (1987) explains the nature of such societies:

Conditioned from childhood to accept a totally man-centred existence—'pati ho to ghar ho, pati nahin to ghar nahin' [your home is only where your husband is]— the widow becomes a non-person when her husband dies, so closely is her psyche linked to her husband's identity.

Thus upon the death of her husband, a widow faces instant poverty, hardship and grief.

Around the world, 12 million girls each year still marry under the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2019). Because of their early marriage, girls usually miss out on their education and hence later opportunities for paid employment and achieving independence. It can also lead to early pregnancy and childbirth which is harmful as the girl's body is not yet fully developed. Adolescent girls are at greater risk of pregnancy related complications, such as obstetric fistulas, and have higher rates of child and maternal death than adult women (Nour, 2006, 2009). While the international community is continuing its efforts to eradicate child marriage, UNICEF estimates it will take another hundred years before this will be achieved in parts of Africa, showing the intractable nature of this complex problem (UNICEF, 2017).

Although much effort has been devoted to ending child marriage in the 21st century, it is useful to view child marriage in its historical context as this can explain some of the reasons behind the practice. In the past, child marriage was considered beneficial at a time when life expectancy was low. For example, in India in 1910, the average life expectancy was just 25.3 years. Such a short life expectancy made early marriage necessary for population maintenance and growth. However, by 1951, life expectancy had increased to 42 years and by 1991, it was 62.1 years for men and 63.3 years for women, making this motive for child marriage obsolete (Reddy, 2004).

2.7 The link between child marriage and child widows

In many parts of the world, girls are married to much older men and find themselves facing all the challenges of widowhood before they have even become adults themselves (Owen, 1996, 2002). Child widowhood is a consequence of child marriage, a tradition driven by poverty, lack of education, social customs and beliefs (Jha et al., 2016). Child marriage and child widowhood are inextricably linked yet the international community has failed to ostensibly make this important connection (ACE&FM, 2018). Due to the illegal nature of child marriage and the difficulty in accessing these girls to gather more accurate data, the issue of child widows has remained conspicuously absent from the UN agenda.

2.8 The importance of education in empowering girls

Evidence from development organisations and researchers working to eradicate child marriage has consistently shown that one of the most effective solutions to prevent child marriage is to keep girls in school (World Bank, 2017). For maximum effectiveness, this should also involve advocacy to educate communities about the harmful effects of child marriage for societies, countries and, most importantly, the girls themselves. This understanding of child marriage has led to changes in the nature and definition of education which has expanded from traditional formal education to vocational training, development of entrepreneurial skills, sexual and reproductive health education, human rights and life skills education (World Bank, 2017). Girls' attendance at school is also known to improve with high-quality female teachers, as some parents are reluctant to send girls to school if the teachers are male. Gender-sensitive curricula and inclusive school admittance policies which accept girls who are married, pregnant, divorced,

widowed or generally abandoned are also greatly needed (Human Rights Watch, 2018). However, the purpose of education goes well beyond delaying marriage; it should empower girls to assert their agency in all spheres of life and change their communities for future generations.

Raising the awareness of parents and communities about the value of education and the detrimental effects of child marriage is vital. The involvement of 'local influencers' such as village elders, chiefs, religious leaders, parliamentarians, doctors, teachers, etc. can help disseminate positive messages about the value of education for all of society.

In most patriarchal societies, men are traditionally expected to have employment outside the home while women's roles are confined to the home (HAQ, 2014). Girls who marry young often miss out on education and have little to no experience in employment outside the home and so are totally dependent on their husband. This traditional division in gendered family roles has important implications for widowhood.

2.9 Factors affecting a widow's future

The decisions a woman makes about her future after widowhood will depend on many factors, including age, rules governing re-marriage, child custody, inheritance rights, right of residence on her husband's property, access to productive resources, the traditional division of labour between the sexes, moral values, views on extra-marital sex and religious and superstitious beliefs about death (Potash, 1986; Owen, 1996; Reddy, 2004).

Social stigmas also play an important role as women who move away from their husband's community are often perceived as promiscuous and uncaring mothers who abandon their children. Another factor which influences a widow's decision to remain in her husband's community is that natal families often refuse to take widows back because they are unable to repay the mahari (payment/property given at marriage). Thus many widows are left with no choice but to remain in their deceased husband's community (Potash, 1986).

2.10 Negative consequences of widowhood on identity and status

Researchers have studied many aspects of widowhood, particularly its negative effect on women's lives. It has been shown to completely alter the social identity of a woman, even to the extent that in some cultures she becomes a non-entity, as her existence formerly depended solely on her husband (Giri, 2002).

In *Problems of Widows in India*, Reddy (2004) explains that widowhood is not a simple transition from one marital status to another but rather is a painful and humiliating experience, in part due to discrimination and harmful mourning rituals imposed by society. Widows not only face economic and social sanctions but also suffer loneliness and deprivation which can often lead to mental health problems. Hence, Reddy describes widowhood and bereavement as "a compound crisis," often resulting in feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.

Furthermore, widowhood is a gendered experience as it affects women much more than men; mourning rituals are far more onerous on widows than widowers. Males do not suffer restrictions on re-marriage or their diet and dress code, the rituals expected of men are less invasive, and they are not required to grieve publicly for long periods like widows (Soussa, 2002; Reddy, 2004; ACE&FM, 2018).

Due to low literacy rates among women and a lack of social support, widows are often deprived of their inheritance (Potash, 1998; Giri, 2002). Reddy (2004) states that many widows are untrained to take up any particular economic activity. As men are in charge of financial affairs, widows may know little about

their husbands' income, and they can easily fall prey to unscrupulous strangers and relatives who cheat them out of their possessions; they can even lose their children. In addition, the widow may become enslaved to her in-laws, carrying out all the household chores while being maltreated and blamed for her husband's death. It is said that the greatest misfortune a woman can face in many societies is to outlive her husband (Giri, 2002; Reddy, 2004).

The manner in which widows are treated also depends on their social status. For example, widows from higher Indian castes are treated more severely than widows from lower castes as they are usually forbidden to re-marry (Reddy, 2004). Most widows are expected to observe certain rituals, and some Hindu women are coerced into observing restrictive dress codes and behaviour. Young widows are sometimes deemed a threat to sexual standards as they are no longer under the control of a male, and widows in general are regarded as 'social untouchables' (Mudbidri Chapter 5 in Reddy 2004).

In contrast, among Christians and Muslims, widowhood is generally accepted, and widows are allowed to re-marry and do not face the same social stigma and discrimination (Mudbidri Chapter 5 in Reddy 2004).

2.11 Impact of a husband's death on family dynamics

The death of a family member is always a shock. However, the death of a husband has an added significance for many women because not only does she lose her partner, protector and breadwinner, but widowhood permanently alters her socio-economic status, lifestyle, identity, self-image and position in the family and society (Owen, 1996; Reddy, 2004; Yadav, 2016). Her status within the family often diminishes, and she may face a loss of privileges, security and independence as she moves from occupying a central role in the family to a marginal one (Ramanamma and Chaudhuri Chapter 10 in Reddy 2004). These changes in family structure and roles often lead to conflict, and widows who lack family support or face hostility from relatives suffer greatly. The death of a husband is even more devastating when the widow is still a child herself, possibly already a mother with young children who is less able to cope with such trauma and responsibility (ACE&FM, 2018).

A widow's bereavement can be even more onerous and enduring in cultures which believe that the death of the husband does not signal the end of the marriage; she remains married to him even after his death and must continue to honour and respect his memory. In some Asian and African cultures, a widow is expected to observe various traditional practices to honour the dead which can be harmful and humiliating. In Ghana and other countries where polygamy is common, the husband may leave behind many co-widows and children (Potash, 1986; Owen, 1996; Perry *et al.*, 2014).

2.12 Mourning rituals and harmful traditional practices

In India, Hindus (who represent 74% of India's 1.35 billion population) mostly follow the widows' codes of conduct set out in ancient religious texts which involve a very public display of grief (ACE&FM, 2018). Women are expected to grieve openly to demonstrate their sadness and to show respect for the dead (Owen, 1996). In many cultures, a widow is 'desexualized,' meaning she is deliberately made to appear physically unattractive. Her appearance is changed as she is no longer allowed to wear make-up, coloured saris, bright bangles, nose rings, perfumes, kumkum or flowers. She is considered a 'bad omen' and is excluded from family celebrations such as weddings, even of her own children (Giri, 2002; Reddy, 2004; ACE& FM, 2018). She is expected to have no contact with men outside the family; if she shows even the slightest interest in a man, she risks being decried as a prostitute. Some widows refuse to follow these customs, but face retaliation from their late husband's family. Widows are often accused of their husband's death, and, in extreme cases, they may be condemned as witches and killed (Owen, 1996; Mudbidri Chapter 5 in Reddy 2004).

Widows in some African communities must similarly engage in a very public display of grief and adhere to harmful mourning rituals such as ‘widow cleansing’ in which they are forced to have sex with a male relative or total stranger to free themselves of their dead husband’s spirit (Women, 2001; Perry, 2014). Cleansing rituals are not only degrading and harmful, but they can also be used to instill fear and control (Owen,1996). While the aim of this practice is to cleanse the widow of the evil spirit which could harm her children, such customs can increase the spread of HIV and other sexually-transmitted diseases (Owen,1996).

A detailed list of harmful and humiliating traditional practices imposed on widows in South East Asia and Africa can be found in ACE&FM’s 2018 publication, “Millions of Child Widows, Forgotten, Invisible and Vulnerable.”

2.13 Access to inheritance

A widow’s future will depend largely on whether she has access to any inheritance. Widows are frequently denied this access due to their lack of legal literacy and manipulation by relatives. Even when widows do have access by law, in practice, they may be unable to access their inheritance because they do not know how (Khanna in Giri 2002). Until recently, many women in Africa did not have any rights of inheritance to their husbands’ estates as property was usually passed on to male members of the family, but discriminatory inheritance laws are now slowly changing.

Given widows’ limited inheritance rights, the only way women could traditionally access productive resources was through kinship. Discriminatory laws against women’s inheritance thus can push widows into poverty, especially because they often have never worked outside the home and so lack employment skills. Because of the traditional division of labour where men seek paid employment outside the home and women depend on their husbands for survival, a woman struggles to survive when her husband dies.

Although the Hindu Succession Act of India (1969, updated in 2005) recognises women’s right to inherit and own property, they are often unable to claim their inheritance due to their community’s belief that land can only be cultivated by men (Giri, 2002). This forces widows to rely on male assistance, but these men often want a share of the crop and try to take over the land. Some widows may eventually have to sell or give up their inheritance and migrate to the city (Giri, 2002; Reddy, 2004).

Although most Indian states offer pension schemes for widows, they are very limited, and there are many difficulties to accessing them. Widows must first prove they have no children to support them, that they are unable to work and do not own property or beg. They also have to visit a government office to submit their application in person, making the financial burden and risk of traveling alone added concerns (Giri, 2002; Ramanamma and Chaudhuri Chapter 10 in Reddy 2004).

In many patriarchal societies, a widow’s in-laws decide what she can inherit. Often, she cannot return to her parents’ home nor remarry. Chen (1992) showed that over 70% of women in India were unable to access their inheritance. This situation has not changed much in the last 25 years. Although legislation may protect property rights in theory, inheritance depends on local customs and common laws, and the inheritance of property still largely follows local practice.

2.14 Customs surrounding a widow’s re-marriage

In addition to the prescribed rules and expectations of marriage, there are also rules about re-marriage after widowhood. From researching the lives of widows in Africa, Potash (1986) argues that widows are confronted with many constraints regarding their future, leaving most with little control over their own lives.

Customs surrounding a widow's re-marriage vary according to culture and religion. Once a woman becomes a widow, especially at a young age, whether she re-marries will depend largely on local customs and whether she has children; if she marries outside the family, she may lose custody of her children as they belonged to the father. In parts of Africa, for example, widows may re-marry, in which case widowhood is only a temporary phase. In Christian and Islamic communities, widowhood is less of an issue because women are allowed to re-marry and do not face social stigma and discrimination (Muddidri in Reddy 2004). In fact, in Islam, marrying a widow is considered a form of social service to provide security.

However, some widows are not allowed to re-marry and are required to spend the rest of their lives alone. Examples include the Lui and Nandi communities in Africa, as well as the aforementioned widows from higher Hindu castes in South Asia (Kapadia, 1968; Gujral, 1987).

Although many widows are content to live alone or with their children while managing their own affairs, in some cultures, they are expected to enter into a levirate relationship following the death of their husband, a practice in which the widow is 'inherited' by her brother-in-law or another male member of the family (Potash, 1996; Giri, 2002). Originally this practice was believed to be a support mechanism for the widow and her children, but it is now considered to be motivated largely by greed and the desire to keep wealth within the husband's family.

2.15 A historical background to the research on widowhood

Betty Potash's collection of essays entitled *Widows in African Societies Choices and Constraints* (1986) was the first anthropological study of widowhood in Africa which highlighted the diversity of widows' lives. The book provides insights through ten case studies from various parts of the continent, from different societies, kinship patterns and economic and political backgrounds. While this collection cannot realistically represent the full diversity of widows' lives on the African continent, the work does nonetheless provide useful insights into the lives of some groups of African widows and is a pioneering work as there was little literature on this subject until the 1990s.

The 1990s represented a turning point in widowhood research due to several events promoting women's human rights during the decade. In 1993, Hilary Clinton used the now well-known phrase, "Women's rights are human rights," at the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna (OHCHR). The conference's outcome was the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action to strengthen human rights. In 1994, the International Conference on Population Development (ICPD) was held in Cairo to highlight the importance of women's and girls' sexual and reproductive rights. In March 1994, Martha Chen from the Harvard Institute of International Development organised a conference on widows in Bangalore, India, gathering for the first time both international researchers and local widows. This conference highlighted the daily challenges faced by widows and the gaps in the research (Chen and Dreze, 1995). Around that time, Martha Chen also published several books and articles on the plight of widows in India.

Another pivotal event was the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. This led to the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action which became the road map for women's human rights, empowerment and development around the globe. However, the Beijing Platform for Action, which will celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2020, did not focus sufficiently on the needs of widows, and child widows were not even mentioned, hence the continued need to raise the profile of widows internationally.

In 1997, Martha Chen noted that, in spite of the tens of millions of widows in India, little was known about their actual living conditions and needs. Thus leading researchers on widowhood highlighted the lack of adequate literature and called for more research. Perhaps responding to this call, in 2002, Dr.

Mohini Giri edited a book on widows in India entitled *Living Death, Trauma of Widowhood in India*. This anthology drew together over twenty contributors offering different perspectives on widowhood in India. Giri emphasised how patriarchal control disempowered Indian widows through practices of patrilineal inheritance and patrilocality (in which women are expected to leave their natal families and communities to cohabit with their husbands upon marriage) (Chen, 1997; Giri, 2002). Giri further notes there is a need to change the narrative surrounding widows from an economic liability to valued members of society. Widows must be socially accepted, and their human rights protected (Giri, 2002; Reddy, 2004). The media in particular has a crucial role to play in changing this narrative and social attitude towards widows, as do all stakeholders.

Unfortunately, research on widows has progressed slowly over the past two decades. Small advances have nevertheless been achieved including the publication of global statistics on widows gathered by the Loomba Foundation and the adoption by the UN of June 23rd as the International Day of Widows.

2.16 The need for more research on widowhood

Potash (1986) lamented that despite representing a significant proportion of the population, little attention has been paid to widows and their roles in communities, and the limited literature that has been published is dispersed and incomplete. Margaret Owen (1996) also commented on the scarcity of research on the status of widows in developing countries, despite it being essential for policy formulation and law reform. She criticized the limited research as being too theoretical whereas it should have provided insights into widows' daily lives as heads of households, mothers and workers. Furthermore, Owen stated that the lack of accurate demographic data and research on widows contributed to the persistence, in many countries, of many forms of discrimination, neglect, oppression and abuse faced by widows.

An additional factor driving the need for more research was the rising number of women widowed due to conflict—their husbands killed in combat—as well as the millions of women who had become widowed due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, polygamy and the wide age gap between men and women in marriage (Owen, 1996; Parthasarathy and Jayalakshmi Chapter 6 in Reddy 2004).

Whilst research on widows has gradually increased, it mostly focuses on adult widows, and any research on child widows remains extremely scarce.

2.17 Research on child widows

Child widows have existed for as long as child marriage, but they are rarely discussed or researched openly. Departing from this trend in an article in *India Today*, Parihar (2008) described several examples of child widowhood in India. One example was an eight-year-old widow in Rajasthan who had been widowed at the age of five yet would never be allowed to re-marry as she was from a high Hindu caste. He also illustrated the difficult life of another young girl who had become a widow at the age of seven when her child husband drowned in a pond. This child widow did not attend school and instead worked in the fields and did all the housework.

Investigating the number of child widows in India, Parihar reported 107,993 cases in the 10-14 age group and 127,003 in the 15-19 age group, which were taken from census data. However, the census report had failed to include any widows under the age of ten, although they clearly existed in parts of India as noted in his report (Parihar, 2008). He commented that such girls were first victims of child marriage and then burdened with the undesirable status of a widow, and they rarely inherited any share of their husband's property.

Parihar (2008) also investigated what social security systems were available for widows and found that although a monthly pension of around Rs 400 (about \$6) was offered to widows by the Indian State Government, parents of many child widows did not apply for this financial support as they would have to admit to an illegal child marriage; Parihar was unable to locate a single widow under 18 who was receiving this state pension. He states: “The lack of will to battle this custom runs like a thread through political parties and religious organisations, as no one wants to speak against it.”

2.18 Margaret Owen’s *A World of Widows*

Apart from a few newspaper articles on child widows in the Indian press, one of the first major attempts to treat the matter at the international level was made by Margaret Owen in her book, *A World of Widows* (1996), in which she devoted an entire chapter to child widows and children of widows. Owen states that widows were often cheated out of their inheritance and made to observe harmful rituals. Some were not allowed to re-marry or were forced to enter a levirate union. She appealed to the international community to conduct more research to understand and address the plight of child widows, but her call to action went largely unheeded, and little has changed over the past two decades.

Describing her difficulty in finding research on child widows for her book chapter on child widows and children of widows, Margaret Owen writes:

So sparse is the literature on the prevalence of child widowhood that this chapter can only touch upon it by describing patterns of child and adolescent marriage and its consequences and point to the need for more research.

Child widows often experience physical, mental and sexual violence including under-age and forced sex. Frequently accused of their husband’s death, labelled ‘inauspicious’ and perceived as promiscuous, they are relegated to the margins of society where, in India, they are conspicuous by their distinctive white clothing and lack of marriage symbols such as the tikka (red dot on the forehead), make-up and colourful jewelry (Giri, 2002; ACE&FM, 2018).

2.19 Child widows research by Dr. Magoke-Mhoja

The Tanzanian human rights specialist Dr. Monica Magoke-Mhoja stated that one of the main reasons for her research and book *Child Widows Silenced and Unheard* (2006) was the lack of research on child widows. Based on her PhD study on child widows in Tanzania, this book is the most comprehensive study on child widows to date. Studying the topic primarily from a legal perspective, she provides testimonies from child widows from three Tanzanian groups to offer insights into the lives of child widows and child wives. Her book also covers the laws of inheritance relating to child widows and considers how human rights provisions embedded in international law and constitutional provisions can be used to offer child widows greater protection. She specifically discusses the plight of child widows in the context of their relationships with adults in their lives, including their natal family, in-laws and inheritors. She highlights the many challenges child widows face when seeking justice which is often limited to the local clan level, a system in which children are systematically denied a voice. Her stories of child widows show that their identity is often entirely subordinated to their various family relationships.

In her analysis of child widows, she found that they face a major life readjustment following the death of their husband; they are instantaneously subjected to poverty and will struggle to provide for themselves and their children. Child widows suffer from discriminatory inheritance laws, and due to their youth, inexperience and lack of financial means to fight legal battles to protect their inheritance, they often lose their homes to dishonest relatives. Consistent with a common tradition of widows entering a levirate

union after the death of a husband, half of the child widows she interviewed had been inherited by their brothers-in-law (all of the eight Maasai girls and 62% of the Kurya child widows). She emphasised that, although the practice of inheriting widows was decreasing due to the fear of contracting HIV/AIDS, many child widows were still pressured to accept the practice for socio-economic reasons including poverty, the need for social security and because their family was unable to refund the mahari (property transferred on marriage). Often the child widows themselves were not consulted about which male relative would inherit them, so the practice itself further disempowered and restricted the rights of these young girls.

Dr. Magoke-Mhoja's research on child widows confirms that the levirate union is not equivalent to a marriage as levirate child wives do not receive the same level of companionship and support, and the inheritor's primary responsibility remains towards his own wife and children.

Child widows' lives are severely restricted; they must seek permission from their inheritor or the older co-wife before speaking to any outsiders, and their mobility is strictly limited. Moreover, they are expected to perform all the household chores without compensation. In some groups of child widows, violence is common; for example, battering was common among the Maasai group (Magoke-Mhoja, 2006). Due to these difficulties, having older sons to support widows in later life was considered to afford widows protection. The perceived benefits of having sons to support them in later life motivated some widows to accept inheritors in the hope of having sons with them. However, even if a child widow has children with another man, they may still be thought to belong to the deceased husband.

2.20 “Millions of Child Widows Invisible, Forgotten and Vulnerable”

To address the paucity of knowledge on child widows, in 2018, ACE&FM published a report entitled “Millions of Child Widows Invisible, Forgotten and Vulnerable” which estimated that there were at least 1.36 million child widows globally, with the figure likely to be much higher due to under-reporting. Child widows, a direct consequence of child marriage, face triple disadvantages of gender, age and widowed status. Already robbed of their childhood, in becoming widows they suffer the trauma of bereavement while undertaking many family responsibilities for which they are ill-equipped.

There are different ways in which child marriage leads to child widowhood. Some girls may become war widows when their husbands are killed in combat while they themselves are still children. Child widows might also arise when young girls are married to elderly men; they may even find themselves co-widows in the case of polygamous marriages (Magoke-Mhoja, 2006). In other instances, a girl may be married at a very young age, virtually from birth, but if the young intended husband dies from either childhood diseases or through an accident, she is also left a child widow (Surkan, 2015). Regardless of the manner in which girls become child widows, they are burdened with the stigma and discrimination that accompanies this undesirable marital status.

One added consequence of child widowhood is that the children of child widows bear the brunt of society's marginalisation. This phenomenon can lead to intergenerational poverty as the children of child widows are more likely to become child brides themselves as a young widow is often unable to afford a dowry and will marry her daughter to a sick or elderly man who will accept little or no dowry (Owen, 1996; HAQ, 2014). Thus, the daughter of a child widow is likely to become a child widow herself.

Invisible in statistics, child widows are often denied their inheritance rights and exploited by others, including their own family members and criminal gangs. These child widows have little or no access to justice and are not adequately protected by human rights instruments such as the CRC, CEDAW, and the Beijing Platform for Action. More research is needed to highlight the plight of this vulnerable group.

2.21 Child widows' rights to protection—theory and practice

In discussing the plight of child widows, it is clear that these are young vulnerable girls who are still children and in need of protection. The CRC is the most ratified United Nations' instrument protecting children, and its preamble serves as a reminder to the international community that the United Nations has proclaimed that all children are entitled to special care and assistance and that every child should grow up in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. Furthermore, the Declaration of the Rights of the Child states that "the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity needs special safeguards and care including appropriate legal protection."

Many of the articles of the CRC are particularly relevant in the context of child widows including:

- States Parties should protect children against all forms of discrimination. (Article 2)
- In all actions concerning children, the best interest of the child should be a primary consideration. (Article 3)
- The child shall be registered immediately after birth. (Article 7)
- The child shall be provided with an opportunity to be heard in judicial or administrative proceedings. (Article 12)
- And shall be protected against all forms of physical or mental violence, injury, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation including sexual abuse. (Article 19)
- The child has the right to health and access to healthcare services, including pre-natal and post-natal healthcare for mothers, and all appropriate measures should be taken to abolish traditional practices detrimental to the health of children. (Article 24)
- States Parties recognise the right to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. (Article 27)
- The right of the child to education shall be preserved. (Article 28)
- States Parties should recognise the right of the child to play and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. (Article 31)
- Children should be protected from work that interferes with their education. (Article 32)
- Children are entitled to freedom from all forms of sexual exploitation, torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. (Article 37)
- All appropriate measures should be taken to promote physical and psychological recovery and social integration of children who are victims of neglect, exploitation, abuse or armed conflicts. (Article 39)

However, Article 1 states that, "for the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years *unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.*" This phrase is at the crux of many of the vulnerabilities child widows' experience. In many cultures, once a girl is married, she is automatically considered an adult regardless of her age and may lose protection under the CRC. Therefore, the CRC, CEDAW and all UN Treaty Bodies must work together to protect child widows. The CRC is in the process of closing this loophole by establishing the minimum age of marriage as 18 without exceptions, which is a very promising development in the fight against child marriage.

In a discussion paper by the International Play Association (IPA, 2016), the authors argue that play is a critical and intrinsic part of healthy human life and development. It is through play and not in the classroom that children learn to socialise with peers and contribute to the culture of their communities.

Additionally, for the 264 million children who do not have access to schools, play is a crucial way to learn about the world around them (UNESCO, 2017).

Research shows that spending time in natural environments while playing has positive benefits such as increasing children's resilience, cognitive functioning and motor ability (Gill, 2014; Soderstrom 2013 in IPA discussion paper 2016). Playing outdoors stimulates the development of mind, body and spirit (Moore and Cosco 2005 in IPA 2016) and can also encourage children to appreciate and protect the natural world and strengthen their ability to cope with stress.

In the context of conflict, humanitarian or natural disasters, play is often given lower priority than the provision of food, shelter and medicines. However, it is exactly in such precarious situations that play, recreation and cultural activities can have an important therapeutic and rehabilitative role in helping children recover a sense of hope, normality, and joy. Given these many advantages of play, it is important that parents, teachers, humanitarian workers and society in general recognise the value of the rights provided in Article 31 of the CRC for all children, including child widows (IPA, 2016).

2.22 Conclusion

Widowhood occurs at all ages and is experienced differently around the world. It is increasing due to conflict, HIV/AIDs, child marriage and ethnic cleansing. The suffering of a widow is exacerbated in developing countries where there is little or no social protection. Due to the traditional division of labour, the death of a husband can leave his widow destitute; without social security, education or employment skills, she faces poverty and bereavement and may also have to endure onerous and gendered mourning rituals to honour and respect the dead.

This literature overview suggests that there is, at present, little information on child widows, although there is an increasing body of literature on adult widows. The seminal writings on child widows remains Margaret Owen's work and the comprehensive academic study of child widows in Tanzania conducted by Dr. Magoke-Mhoja. Their work has been supported by reports from India Today and other media sources.

ACE&FM's 2018 report "Millions of Child Widows, Forgotten, Invisible and Vulnerable," which estimates that there are over 1.36 million child widows, also makes a significant contribution to raising awareness of their struggle.

2.23 Statement of the Problem

Research on child widows is scarce, and at present there are no guidelines on how to support the over a million neglected child widows in the world. Upon the death of her husband, a child widow like other widows may lose her identity and social status and face poverty, insecurity, and violence. Widows are often denied their inheritance and may have to resort to prostitution or begging to survive. She may be obliged to observe onerous and gendered mourning rituals, adhere to strict dress codes and dietary restrictions to discourage male attention, or she may be forced to undergo 'widow cleansing' involving sex with a male family member or a stranger to exorcise her dead husband's spirit. While these challenges are extremely difficult for anyone, they are exacerbated when the widow is a mere child herself yet is expected to behave as an adult and assume a myriad of adult responsibilities. The daughters of child widows often suffer the same fate as their mothers, thus repeating the cycle of poverty, child marriage and child widowhood.

In the preamble to the CRC, it states that the child is entitled to special care and assistance. Furthermore, the Declaration of the Rights of the Child asserts that "the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity needs special safeguards and care including appropriate legal protection."

Although there is evidence that child widows do exist and are highly vulnerable, the international community has not yet acknowledged their plight nor mobilised resources to support them. In addition, in the context of the SDGs' principle of "leave no one behind," the international community has failed to assume its obligations and responsibilities to protect this group of children. While calls for more research on child widowhood have been repeated for over two decades, little effort has been made to include them on the UN agenda. The scarcity of research on these vulnerable girls has inevitably hampered international acknowledgement of their existence and any action to support them.

Thus the purpose of the research presented hereafter is twofold: (1) to offer useful information concerning the level of awareness of child widows, their needs and the best ways to support them, and (2) to galvanise international, national and local action to support them.

SECTION 3

METHODOLOGY

This section on methodology describes the research aims, the methods and sampling technique used, the research sample selected, the instrument used for data collection and the process of data analysis and interpretation.

3.1 Research aims

Given that the lack of information on child widows has hindered international efforts to support this group, and there are no guidelines on how to support child widows, this research sets out to achieve the following aims:

1. To determine if stakeholders working on child marriage prevention, widowhood, women's and children's health, human rights and development, as well as researchers and religious groups are aware of the plight of child widows; and
2. From stakeholders' knowledge of child widows, to assess the needs of child widows and understand how to support them with a view towards producing for the first time a policy document providing practical guidance for supporting child widows at the international, national, and local levels.

3.2 Research outcomes

The outcome of this research is to provide for the first time practical guidance for supporting child widows at the international, national and local levels.

3.3 Research methods used

Two research methods were used for data collection:

- (1) a semi-structured questionnaire distributed by email;
- (2) a posting to an online website for international activists requesting information on child widows based on the email questionnaire adapted for use on the new platform.

3.3.1 Method 1: Semi-structured questionnaire

The research instrument was a semi-structured questionnaire which was administered by email. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: the first relating to basic questions about stakeholders' level of awareness of child widows, the second focusing on child widows' needs and what could be done to support them. The questionnaire included 11 questions, some of which were subdivided into further questions.

Both simple closed questions (such as "Are you aware of the existence of child widows, Yes or No?") and open-ended questions designed to elicit more detailed responses from stakeholders were used. The open-ended questions were analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques.

A total of 85 questionnaires were distributed from November 2018 to February 2019 to participants in almost 30 countries. Periodic follow up reminder emails were sent up to three times to non-responders. Of the individuals contacted, 42 completed and returned the questionnaires, both those already known to be knowledgeable on child widows and those who it was assumed might be knowledgeable. This relatively high rate of return for an email questionnaire could be attributed to the researcher's personal knowledge of some of the stakeholders through conducting prior research on child widows for an earlier report. In addition, some names were provided by intermediary organisations which encouraged involvement.

3.3.2 Justification for purposive sampling technique

A purposive sampling technique was used in this study because it allows researchers to select participants whom they consider to be the most suitable for providing the information required. Thus this method offered the researcher the opportunity to target informed individuals with the knowledge sought (Palys, 2008; Etikan et al., 2016)

A further justification for using purposive sampling was that the sample size is determined by data saturation rather than by statistical power analysis (Zhi 2014 in Etikan et al. 2016). With purposive sampling methods, emphasis is placed on saturation, i.e. obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the topic by continuing to sample until no new substantive information is found (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This method is useful for understanding a little known topic such as child widows and has the advantage of eliminating the need to include a large sample size in order to produce credible findings (Kira, 2014). However, the main limitation of this non-random selection technique is that it limits the inferences which can be drawn from the findings.

As the information sought in this study was very specific and could not be obtained by selecting a random sample of the population, a specific group of stakeholders was targeted using a purposive sampling technique. Stakeholders were defined as those who had already been identified as knowledgeable about child widows and others who might be familiar with them through their work on child marriage prevention, widowhood, women's and children's human rights, religious groups, researchers and parliamentarians. Certain organisations and individuals were therefore deliberately targeted to increase the likelihood of finding the desired information (Etikan et al., 2016).

The research questionnaire was designed and analyzed by four members of ACE&FM. Prior to distribution, the questionnaire was tested for ease of understanding and completion within a small group.

The questionnaire was distributed with an email explaining the purpose of the study and how the data would be used with instructions on how to complete it and the date by which to return it and to whom. Participants were offered the option to provide the information anonymously. Each questionnaire

received was acknowledged with thanks and stored in a file for analysis. A small number of stakeholders were contacted for further details and clarification.

3.3.3 Analysis of questionnaires

To ensure that the analysis was undertaken systematically, the findings were tabulated in Excel tables. The data consisted of the results from one group of stakeholders already known to be knowledgeable on child widows and from another group who were considered to potentially have useful information about child widows due to working in related fields. The findings from these two groups were analyzed separately initially but later combined as the findings of both groups of stakeholders were quite similar. There were also some stakeholders who had little or no knowledge of child widows which demonstrates that it is not a universally recognised phenomenon.

The Excel tables with stakeholders' responses were first studied independently by the team of researchers and then discussed together to consider points of convergence with a view to agreeing a framework for presenting the findings.

The analysis involved careful reading of the completed returned questionnaires to identify recurring ideas, concepts, perceptions, opinions, suggestions and words. The recurring information was then organized into themes, removing any redundancy, to leave a framework which could accommodate all the findings. Discussions were held to clarify the treatment of overlapping themes and any usual observations.

During the analysis, further discussions were held to define and label categories so that it was clear what information would be coded under each category to ensure data was coded in a consistent manner.

Once a framework had been agreed, all the information from each questionnaire was coded under the relevant theme until all the text had been accommodated within the framework. The researchers' own ideas were recorded separately from those of stakeholders.

The themes from the questionnaires were then rearranged into a logical order through discussing the meaning of each theme and the interconnections between the themes to understand the general level of awareness of the plight of child widows, their needs and how to best support them. A small number of quotes were selected to illustrate and substantiate the interpretations made or to explain the data.

3.3.4 Method 2: Message posted on World Pulse website

In addition to distributing the questionnaire by email, the founder of an online website for activists called World Pulse was contacted for permission to use the site to post a message to subscribers requesting their help in collecting information about child widows. World Pulse is a platform created in 2005 for international social activists to connect, collaborate and share information. It has 64,000 members from 190 countries.

A message was posted on the World Pulse website in December 2018 explaining the purpose of the study, how the information would be used and the date and email address by which to return the questionnaire. Individuals were asked to respond to a shortened version of the questionnaire and to email their responses to the researcher privately or to post on the public forums of the World Pulse platform. The messages and questionnaire itself on this platform were deliberately kept short as this online group seemed to favour short interactions. Despite posting the message twice, the level of response from subscribers was low relative to the large size of the membership. However, some useful insights were obtained from respondents from Cameroon, Canada, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria, the

Philippines, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago and Uganda.

The researcher was also encouraged by World Pulse staff to search through the archives for any stories related to child widows. Only one story mentioning a child widow was found from a contributor from Nepal.

Given that there is no previous research on the level of awareness of the problem of child widows, their needs or how to best support them, this research was designed to address these questions.

The next section provides the research findings for the semi-structured questionnaires and the posting to the online platform World Pulse.

SECTION 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

A total of 85 questionnaires were distributed by email between November 2018 and February 2019, of which 42 were completed and returned. Two groups of stakeholders were contacted: those who had already been identified as being knowledgeable on child widows and a further group that might know about child widowhood through their work on child marriage or adult widows.

The responses to the questionnaire were completed by individuals from 22 countries:

Afghanistan, Belgium, Cameroon, Canada, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, France, Ghana, India, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Nepal, Nigeria, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda and the United Kingdom.

Of the total number of questionnaires received, only about half were very knowledgeable on child widows. Thus, the most detailed information in this report is based on data from around 20 organisations who have worked with child widows, known them personally, supported them, represented them or have researched and written about them.

However, it must be noted that child widowhood like child marriage does not occur in every country and the numbers of child widows are likely to be very small compared to the number of child brides. In addition, child widowhood has received little or no international attention, and many organisations have not ostensibly made the link between child marriage and child widows.

The organisations represented in this sample included international development agencies, UN agencies, international and grassroots NGOs, academic institutions, a think tank, faith-based organisations, child widowhood experts, researchers, human rights experts, members of human rights commissions and a parliamentarian.

The list of organisations which took part is available in the appendix on page 61. Organisations which completed the questionnaire but chose to remain anonymous have not been included.

The following summary and analysis of stakeholders' responses is based on all of the responses to the questionnaires received.

4.2 Summary and analysis of stakeholders' responses

Question 1: Are you aware of child widows, Yes or No?

Responses:

34/42 stakeholders said they were aware of child widows and 8/42 said they were not. However, some of the stakeholders who said that they were aware of child widows were unable to provide any information other than being aware of their existence.

Question 2: In which countries/settings do you know about child widows?

Responses:

Afghanistan, Burundi, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, India, Kashmir, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Namibia, Nepal, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

Question 3: How do you know about child widows?

Responses:

- Living in a particular country where child widows occur (e.g. Malawi).
- Reading media accounts and reports about child widows (Nigeria).
- Conducting PhD research on child widows (Tanzania).
- Working with single mothers (widows) and child brides (Nepal).
- Discovering isolated cases of child widows in remote areas (Kenya).
- Providing direct support to child widows (Kenya).
- From field visits as part of the work of the Human Rights Commission (Nepal).
- Meeting them when they attend sexual reproductive health centres and gender-based violence programmes (Uganda).
- Meeting them when they attend activities organised for victims of sexual abuse and women's and girls' safe spaces (Syria).
- From visits to villages where families had sometimes taken the girls back (Northern Democratic Republic of Congo).
- Working with underprivileged women including widows (India).
- Conducting a PhD study on widows (Malawi).
- Visiting an internally displaced persons camp and reports from humanitarian workers (Nigeria).
- From working with a network of partner organisations in different countries
- Through legal training work (Ghana).
- From working on children's rights in Afghanistan.
- Because their existence in the villages in Afghanistan is common knowledge.
- Through attending the funerals of some of their husbands as a religious leader.
- From stories of young girls married to very old men who died leaving behind child widows being discussed amongst families.
- Due to the high prevalence of child widows in Nepal.
- From hosting conferences and field visits (parliamentarian, Brussels).
- Stories circulating in the Church about child widows.
- From knowing some women who were child widows (Nepal, Afghanistan).
- From articles in the literature.
- Through general social awareness (India).
- Through conducting research on child marriage (UK).

The findings show that stakeholders acquired their knowledge of child widows in different ways from direct contact with them in a refugee camp in Syria, to supporting them in local communities, to reading about them in the media, living in a particular country where child widows are prevalent or through conducting research.

Question 4: Are you aware of any statistics about child widows?

Responses:

Most stakeholders were unable to provide any statistics on child widows.

Four organisations in Kenya, Syria, Afghanistan and India offered the following information:

The Rural Economic Enhancement Programme (REEP) in Kenya worked with 357 widowed girls aged between 10 to 17. These child widows were part of a total of 2,500 adolescent or child mothers which REEP supported in Busnia, Siaya and Kakamenga counties.

World Vision International (WVI) operating in a refugee camp in Aleppo, Syria estimated they had been in contact with about 100 child widows who had used their services.

The Human Rights Commission in Afghanistan kept a database on violence against women. Many widows were amongst those who reported violence and sought help, and within this group of widows, around 14% were child widows.

The Guild of Service in India in partnership with UNIFEM conducted a study in 2011 on widows in the city of Vrindavan. In a random sample size of 552 widows, they found 6% were widowed between the ages of 10 and 17 and 2% before they were 10 years old. This is a decline from a previous 2006 study.

Only 4 organisations out of 42 were able to provide any statistics on child widows, suggesting that significant data is simply not collected. Many factors may contribute to this lack of data including child widows being a relatively unknown and small group, the difficulties in identifying them, girls being discouraged from speaking out about their plight, the illegality of child marriage, girls themselves keeping their status as child widows hidden as disclosure might jeopardise their chances of future re-marriage and some girls are re-married very quickly, so she does not remain a child widow for very long.

Question 5: Why do you think some people might be unaware of child widows?

Responses:

“This was a group which was taken for granted and forgotten. They [child widows] do not fit into standard categories...”

“They are neither single mothers as defined by most intervention programs, married women or adolescent girls.” Furthermore, they are not treated as a special group even though they have particular needs. (NGO, Cameroon).

“In my community all widows are regarded as widows without categorising their age.” (Religious leader, Tanzania).

Other reasons included:

- Child widowhood is an under-researched topic.
- People are unaware of them as there is no information about them.
- If they have been married, the girls are assumed to be able to take care of themselves.
- Girls keep quiet about their widowhood status as they want to re-marry because they rely on this for their livelihood and security. Telling others could reduce their chances of finding another husband.

- Child widows are not allowed to speak out about their misfortune.
- Although the girls marry as children, by the time their husband dies, they may just have become adults in which case they are forgotten.
- Some girls remain isolated and do not seek help for fear of mistreatment, stigmatisation or being branded a murderer of their deceased husband.
- As a result of teenage pregnancies, there may be generational barriers and moral or judgmental attitudes amongst some workers in the support groups which prevent them from reaching out to help child widows.

Question 6: Do you think more awareness of child widows is needed?

Responses:

All except one respondent answered in the affirmative. One stakeholder said “maybe” as they had not come across child widows in Lebanon where they had conducted research on Syrian girls. Child divorcees were a more important issue in Lebanon, but the respondent acknowledged that perhaps there were more child widows in conflict zones such as Syria.

Question 7: Does your organisation provide any services for child widows?

Responses:

Several stakeholders provided services to child widows but usually these were not specifically for child widows, but rather were blanket interventions for widows, girls or women.

One organisation in Cameroon provided humanitarian assistance and psychosocial support through counselling.

A religious leader’s church from Ghana provided vocational training and support to help widows make and sell their products on the market.

Another stakeholder said they offered help according to need.

REEP in Kenya supported child widows by helping them claim their inheritance, returning them to school, protecting them from harmful cultural practices such as ‘widow inheritance’ (levirate unions), assisting them to start up income generating projects, training them in parenting skills, educating them about family planning and HIV/AIDs and providing life skills training.

A stakeholder from a faith-based organisation said that if child widows are known within the community, they are offered companionship and humanitarian assistance.

In Malawi and other countries, church groups often provide support for widows.

An NGO in Nepal provided shelter for women including child widows.

An NGO supporting orphaned children including child widows in Kenya helped girls and boys with school re-enrolment and worked in child marriage prevention.

One organisation in Tanzania provided economic empowerment and informal education to child widows through its various partners.

An NGO in Uganda implemented interventions on preventing sexual abuse among children, worked in child marriage prevention and in raising awareness of sexual and reproductive health services in Uganda. Through these interventions they had contact with victims of sexual abuse, including child widows.

In Liberia, an NGO provided counselling and services geared towards the economic and social empowerment of widows, although this was not specifically for child widows.

Member churches of the World Council of Churches provide support groups for widows in many local communities to enable them to learn from each other, receive spiritual support as well as legal and economic information; e.g. in South Africa they learn how to access child support grants.

An international development organisation in Syria provides services to child widows within the framework of generic women's and girls' support activities e.g. providing menstrual hygiene kits, dignity kits in camps, education, recreational activities, psychosocial support, help with coping strategies and some were even helped to set up small businesses.

An NGO in Nepal engaged religious leaders and men and boys in preventing child marriages as among some castes, girls were still married before first menstruation.

In India, one organisation provides shelter, education, legal assistance and counselling as part of helping women including widows.

One organisation in the DRC helps young widows with education, vocational skills and spiritual support.

From the responses received about the provision of services to child widows, only one organisation in Kenya specifically cared for a large number of child widows and child mothers. Most of the other organisations provided support for child widows within the broader framework of services and activities for women, girls or widows in general. Church groups which are present in many communities often provided support to all widows generally, which likely included some child widows. It was seen earlier that child widows sometimes made use of sexual and reproductive health services, gender-based violence prevention activities or safe spaces for women and girls, but generally there were no services specifically dedicated to providing support to child widows. However, the findings from Syria and Uganda are encouraging in that they indicate that child widows were nonetheless able to access some support services, suggesting the importance of the work of organisations which provide these services and safe spaces.

Child widows seem to be an elusive group of vulnerable children who are not found in large numbers in any one place but are scattered within the community and therefore not easily identifiable as a particular group in need, and hence maybe difficult to target. They are invisible in statistics and generally there are few services dedicated to serving their needs in local communities.

Question 8: Are you aware of any other groups of abandoned children?

Responses:

- Child divorcees were raised as a problem in Lebanon and Ethiopia.
- Children suffering from mental disorders such as depression.
- Orphans and runaway juveniles.
- Children born out of rape (e.g. girls forced to marry Boko Haram fighters)
- Children who were acting as head of households (e.g. parents had died in the Nepal earthquake).
- Street children, some of whom end up on the streets after their parents' divorce.
- Children of widows whose husbands had disappeared.
- Children with illnesses such as cancer and diabetes.
- Disabled children.
- Children in government and non-government hospital maternity wards in Afghanistan.

During data collection, the questionnaire was expanded to ask stakeholders if they were aware of other groups of abandoned children as it became evident that child widows were not the only vulnerable group in communities. Child divorcees were mentioned in the data as a more significant problem than child widows in some countries such as Lebanon and Ethiopia, where divorce rates for child marriages are high. The complicated question of street children also arose. These children are left to fend for themselves, sometimes due to their parent's divorce or death, and they often survive by begging on the streets. Due to the high level of drug and alcohol abuse among this population, many NGOs and charities struggle to support street children. Additionally, media reports have highlighted the difficult situation of young girls married to ISIS fighters, many of whom have young children and may be widowed but are rejected by their own countries as they are viewed as a threat to national security. In other instances, even the parents and communities of such girls may reject them, such as those who were captured by Boko Haram.

The next series of questions concern the various needs of child widows and ways to address those needs.

Question 9: What are the needs of child widows?

Main themes	Sub-themes
Acknowledgement and awareness of their existence and diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child widows need acknowledgement of their existence by society. They must be recognized as a vulnerable group, be heard and given opportunities to express their needs so that they no longer suffer in silence. Child widows are not a homogeneous group but can be of different ages, nationalities and from different life circumstances. Nepal has many 'virgin widows' (kumari vidhava) who were married very young and whose husbands died even before they were old enough to live with them; there are also older child widows (vaikalayas), but in both cases their status as widows means they must observe certain mourning rituals. Young girls who elope for a 'love marriage' without parental consent, face even greater hardship and stigma if their husband dies as their families will often reject them. Similarly, some young Boko Haram child widows who were forced to marry soldiers are rejected by their communities, especially if they have children fathered by Boko Haram fighters. Child and young widows of Taliban and ISIS fighters may also be rejected or be unable to return home due to national security issues.
Basic survival needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child widows need safety, food, shelter, clothing, healthcare and general care.
Economic empowerment and financial assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the short-term, child widows need financial assistance to survive (since they were likely totally dependent on their husbands), especially if they are pregnant or already mothers. In the longer term, they need livelihood skills training, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities to enable them to become financially independent.
Social protection measures to address poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poverty must be addressed as a root cause of child marriage. Poor families who are at risk of marrying their daughters while still children should be given financial assistance. Child mothers in particular require social protection and financial support in order to end the cycle of poverty and child marriage.
Legal protection, access to justice and legal assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child widows have rights under the law which must be respected and upheld. They need legal protection, access to justice and the possibility of holding abusers accountable. They need legal assistance to obtain vital documents (e.g. birth certificates, marriage licenses, etc.) to claim their inheritance, assert property rights or access services.
Access to healthcare services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child widows need access to healthcare services for themselves and their children, including psychological and emotional counselling. Health education must be accessible, adolescent-friendly and non-judgmental and cover topics such as personal and child hygiene and sexual and reproductive health and services (HIV risks, safe sex, contraceptive use, etc.).

Main themes	Sub-themes
Support for child mothers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Child mothers need support with parenting skills and information on raising a child including their physical, emotional, social and intellectual development. ● Financial assistance for mothers and their children. ● Education on childcare including nutrition, development, childhood diseases, vaccinations, etc. ● Childcare facilities to allow adolescent mothers to return to school, acquire vocational skills or go to work.
Personal development skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Child widows need personal development skills training such as confidence building and negotiation skills to make their own decisions, assertiveness training to voice their needs, and literacy skills to manage their finances and make informed decisions about their future.
Recreational facilities and the right to play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The right to play is a fundamental right which must be met as it is a crucial aspect of child development. Hence, child widows should be separated from adult widows for some activities as their needs are different. ● Child widows need recreational facilities where they can be free to play as children and reclaim their childhood, instead of being expected always to behave as wives, mothers and widows.
Peer support in safe spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Child widows require peer support and thus need places to meet other young girls in a safe, free and comfortable environment to share their experiences, form friendships, have a collective voice and build resilience.
Education-related needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Opportunities to complete their education in order to obtain paid employment and achieve independence. ● Some child widows may need vocational training rather than formal schooling. ● Scholarships and stipends to fund their education. ● Inclusive school admittance policies which do not discriminate against married, widowed, pregnant, divorced or abandoned girls. ● Positive discrimination policies in schools and training colleges to give child widows priority and reserve special places for them to enable them to catch up with their education. ● Human rights education to understand and exercise their rights as children, girls, mothers and widows.
Protection from all forms of violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Child widows need protection from all forms of violence, including but not limited to physical and mental, domestic violence committed by their families, sexual or gender-based violence or economic exploitation such as trafficking or prostitution. ● Protection from social discrimination, stigma and abuse from in-laws as they are often labelled a bad omen, a curse on the family, blamed for their husband's death and excluded from family, cultural and religious ceremonies. ● Protection from harmful traditional practices such as child marriage and mourning rituals which may damage their health and infringe upon their human rights.
Social acceptance and integration in society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Child widows need to be integrated into society and given opportunities for education and employment. Their rehabilitation should be without discrimination or exploitation. ● They must be allowed to live their lives with dignity, free from stigma, discrimination and violence. They need a sense of belonging to a family and community with care and love.
Support centres for child widows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Child widows would benefit from one-stop service centres where all their needs could be met under one roof e.g. skills training, education, shelter, healthcare and legal help.
Spiritual guidance for healing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Some child widows will need pastoral care and spiritual guidance as they may struggle to understand and cope with their husband's death. They may need healing support and to be accompanied on this difficult journey. Church groups are often well placed to provide such assistance.

Main themes	Sub-themes
Government responsibility and accountability for child widows services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local and national governments should provide coordinated services for child widows with clear lines of responsibility and accountability. Governments should not expect NGOs to carry the sole burden of care. Governments should coordinate efforts with local communities such as church groups to help to provide more holistic care, including spiritual support.
Research on child widows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research on child widows is needed to document their locations, ages, numbers, circumstances of their marriage, including identifying which actors were involved. This can help provide much needed evidence for global policy development and help galvanise action to support this neglected group.

The findings suggest that child widows need many different types of support, preferably provided under one roof. They need acknowledgement of their existence and diversity, basic survival essentials such as food, clothing, healthcare, financial assistance and also economic empowerment, social protection to address poverty, access to child-friendly justice, legal protection and assistance, support for child mothers, personal development skills, recreational facilities and the right to play as children, peer support in safe spaces, education, protection from all forms of violence, social acceptance and integration in society and pastoral/spiritual care for healing. Research on child widows is also essential. Governments in collaboration with all stakeholders must be committed to providing such services with clear lines of responsibility and accountability, recalling that most governments have ratified the CRC which clearly sets out their obligations to provide such services.

Question 10: Are child widows' needs met?

Responses:

About half of respondents indicated "no" or said that the needs of child widows were only partially met; half did not respond to the question.

The explanations given for why their needs are not met included:

- Child widows were not identified as a distinct group with special needs.
- There is little or no awareness of their existence and their marital status as child widows meant they were considered an adult in society regardless of their age, so their needs are ignored.

"Because no one is prepared to help them. People believe that since they are married, they have become adults so they should be able to take care of themselves and their children." (Church Leader, Ghana).

Generally, the data suggests that child widows' needs are not met or are only partially met. It is evident that, as many communities are not even aware of their existence, they are unlikely to have access to services to support them.

Question 11: How can child widows' needs be addressed at the international level?

- Ensure all Treaty Bodies are aware of child widows and work to protect their rights e.g. CRC, CEDAW, UPR.
- Encourage CEDAW to develop a general recommendation on widowhood so that reporting governments can be questioned, and progress monitored.
- Consider the issue of child widowhood a violation of human rights like child marriage.
- Ratify and implement all UN instruments to protect girls from early marriage and other forms of violence.
- Campaign to ban child marriage in all countries.

- Criminalise all individuals involved in child marriages.
- Insist that Governments adopt suitable policies and programs to address child widows.
- Request UN Women to establish a desk dedicated to widowhood.
- Request UN Women to urge Member States to work with their national NGOs to make child widows voices heard, listen to their needs and help to rebuild their lives.
- Include child widows on the agendas of all international and regional organisations such as the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union and others under children's rights, women's rights and human rights.
- Campaign within UN agencies e.g. UNICEF and UN Women to raise awareness of the plight and concerns of child widows, including those in conflict situations, and formulate adequate policies.
- Provide resources for community-based organisations dealing with child widows
- Encourage international donors to allocate funds to address the needs of child widows and to prevent child marriage.
- Debate the issue, monitor and report cases, share knowledge and best practices.
- Gather disaggregated data on child widows, such as their number, ages and locations to map their prevalence and research their life experiences.
- Enlist the support of all relevant UN Special Rapporteurs (SR) such as the SR on Violence Against Women (VAW), Extreme Poverty, Torture, Education, the Sale of Children and Trafficking and the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Also enlist the support of the committees of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights (ICESR) and the Human Rights Council (HRC). Raise awareness of the issue within the SDG agenda.
- Include child widows in all UN instruments, the Beijing Platform for Action and UN Security Council Resolutions 1320 and 1825.
- Enforce stricter sanctions on Member States which do not protect girls/women.
- Eradicate poverty as a key driver of child marriage.

The findings suggest that more needs to be done at the international level to address child widows such as strengthening legal systems, enforcing international law, galvanizing human rights bodies, prioritising child widows on the UN agenda, providing dedicated funds to support child widows, collecting disaggregated data and addressing child marriage globally including criminalizing all actors.

Question 12: How can child widows' needs be met on the national level?

- Implement and enforce national laws against child marriage.
- Provide child-friendly access to justice so their grievances can be voiced and addressed.
- Set the minimum age of marriage as 18 and prosecute the perpetrators of child marriage.
- Include the issue of child widows and child marriage in national government action plans, draft policies to meet child widows needs and report progress to CEDAW and other human rights Treaty Bodies.
- Allocate funds in annual budgets for child widows services as part of the national planning process alongside child marriage prevention.
- Introduce and enforce national laws and policies to address the needs of child widows and to protect their human rights.
- Collect statistics on child widows through surveys and national census.

- Organise community-based advocacy and awareness campaigns throughout the country on child widows and raise awareness of child widows in schools, colleges, universities and churches.
- Amend all discriminatory laws against widows and child widows, especially concerning inheritance and property rights and also the right to re-marry.
- Ban all harmful traditional practices such as child marriage, levirate unions, polygamy and harmful mourning rituals.
- Eradicate poverty as a priority as this is a major driver of child marriage.
- Provide free and compulsory education for all girls, monitor school attendance closely and immediately follow up any school dropouts.
- Introduce positive discrimination policies for child widows' education such as reserving special places for them in educational and professional institutions to give them priority access to education they missed earlier in their lives.
- Provide and strengthen affordable and accessible compulsory civil registration systems (marriage, birth and death registration systems).
- Urge UN Women to encourage member states to collaborate with their national NGOs to collect data on child widows, hear their voices, listen to their needs and help them to rebuild their lives.
- Share best practices such as the positive example set by Malawi which criminalises harmful traditional practices including mourning and burial rites.

The findings suggest that at national level most of the measures involve legal reforms on child marriage and widow inheritance. Child widows should be provided with education, awareness of their plight should be raised through national campaigns, governments should include and fund services for child widows as part of their national action plan, harmful traditional practices should be addressed, the sharing of best practices should be encouraged, poverty eradication should be a priority as it is a major driver of child marriage and disaggregated data should be collected for policy change and reform.

4.3 Summary and analysis of data from the World Pulse website

A message was posted to the World Pulse website requesting help with this study. Despite having 64,000 subscribers from 190 countries, only a total of 16 respondents from 9 countries contacted the researcher either through the website or at a private email address provided. The respondents were from:

The Democratic Republic of Congo (4)
 The Philippines (1)
 Uganda (3)
 Ethiopia (1)
 Spain (1)
 Canada (1)
 Nigeria (1)
 Cameroon (1)
 Trinidad and Tobago (1)
 Unknown (2)

Only five complete sets of answers to the shorter version of the questionnaire posted on the website were received, but several other respondents engaged in email exchanges both on the public website and privately to discuss child widows and related issues.

There was a mixed response regarding awareness of child widows in this group with some respondents saying they had never heard of the issue while others knew about child widows through the World Pulse

website or from living in a country where child widows exist such as Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo or Uganda.

Some of the respondents, such as one from the Philippines, offered similar suggestions to the responses received from the email questionnaires, highlighting the importance of education, vocational skills and support systems for child widows.

A respondent from Spain with no direct contact with child widows highlighted the importance of ensuring that girls were not married without their consent or before the age of 18. The respondent noted that girls need to have a voice to enable them to consent to or refuse a marriage, but generally they should not marry before the age of 18.

In response to the needs of child widows, one respondent pointed out the importance of having a good and healthy family life, where a girl is valued and kept at home rather than married early, is allowed to have an education and is given the same respect and opportunities as her brothers.

As to what should be done nationally and internationally, suggestions included that the minimum age of marriage should be set at 18, girls should be empowered to give their consent to marriage and laws against child marriage should be implemented and enforced.

The respondent from the Philippines suggested that child widows need a proper education in order to become independent. As they were married at a young age, they may also need psychotherapy, and a strong support system is vital. Such girls must be allowed to “explore and find their passion, cultivate and hone it so they can blossom into empowered women.” Furthermore, she stated that, in the Philippines where there are many teenage pregnancies, some girls are able to recover from their situation because of a strong support system of family and friends and government policies which encouraged girls to return to school and to follow a career.

On supporting child widows locally, respondents suggested providing livelihood skills training to enable them to earn an income. At the international level, the major points included enacting laws against child marriage as this violates the rights of the child, changing cultural mindsets and continued support for education.

One activist from Addis Ababa highlighted the much larger problem of child divorcees where she lived. These were highly vulnerable girls, who were married early to much older men and had given birth before their bodies were fully developed. Many of these adolescent girls were affected by the medical problem of an obstetric fistula resulting from prolonged labour and lack of adequate medical assistance during delivery. Girls who develop fistulas during childbirth are often rejected by their husbands and abandoned at their parents' home. A girl who experiences this complication is considered a disgrace by her family because of the constant bad odour from the leakage of urine and faeces as she is unable to control her bodily functions. Although there is a hospital which can repair fistulas, there is stigma attached to the treatment due to ignorance about the condition.

When questioned about other groups of abandoned children in Ethiopia, the respondent commented that a friend had adopted two street children and that “good people” were helping them, but she was unaware of any organisations which supported abandoned children. She volunteers with the Environment First Charitable Society of Ethiopia which supports young girls aged 8-16 with disability or diseases such as cancer and diabetes. They try to provide a clean and safe environment for children offering them food, clothing and love. Younger children under eight are sometimes found on the street usually with their mother, with some having been born on the street. One headmaster was trying to motivate around a thousand homeless children from Southern Ethiopia to attend school, but it was a challenging task.

This respondent knew of a woman who was supporting children through church donations and friends. She explained that there were many street children, some of whom supported themselves by selling mobile phone cards or shining shoes. She had also heard on the radio of girls as young as thirteen being forced into sex work. Many children came to Addis Ababa with the hope of fulfilling their dreams, but in

reality many simply get lost. Some of the young girls become mentally ill from the stress of being on the streets and confronting so many challenges. Other children end up on the streets because their parents' divorce. Many of the children are powerless and have been denied care.

These children need "love, protection, shelter and to be able to sleep somewhere safe without fear of the police or the big guys who use them," she says. She commented that this lack of security creates a vicious cycle as the young girls on the streets get raped and end up as young mothers on the streets with no support. Moreover, there is little desire to help street children because many of them have already acquired addictions and are difficult to manage.

Girls were under pressure to give birth quickly after marriage as "unless a woman gives birth young, she was not called beautiful." She said stories circulated of children as young as six being put onto a bus by their mother and left to fend for themselves in the big cities.

In Addis Ababa, people do offer food and money to beggars and thus the children manage to survive. The children sometimes use the money they get to buy alcohol and drugs to help cope with the cold and hunger. Many groups of children are not cared for by anyone.

One respondent from the Network for Community Development in Uganda who was aware of child widows explained:

While child widows exist in our communities, this is kept secret because of the stigma attached to it. Child marriage is a huge burden, so becoming a widow and declaring it openly means ruining a chance of a second marriage. Most children married early look at marriage as a source of security and survival.

One respondent from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) said she was aware of child widows in the DRC who once widowed were prevented from re-marrying due to traditional customs. She said child and forced marriages did occur because the country had experienced wars since 1964 to the present day.

There was a deliberate policy of child marriage because such a large number of men had been killed in the wars, so this was an effort to increase the number of children to replenish the declining population. Most child marriages occur in the rural areas which are often hard to reach.

Despite the large volume of information on a variety of topics stored in the archives, including widows, only one story related to child widows was found written by an activist from Nepal whose friend became widowed at a very young age and eventually died soon after under unexplained circumstances.

In conclusion, the data from the World Pulse website elicited fewer responses than the questionnaire, especially considering the large size of the membership. However, the information received from this site did provide some useful insights through communicating directly with the respondents.

It was notable that the suggestions for the needs of child widows and how to address them were quite similar although less detailed than some of the email questionnaire responses. The two sets of data thus broadly complemented each other. One fresh insight was the deliberate use of child and forced marriage as a policy to increase the population because so many individuals had been killed by conflict in the DRC.

4.4 Case studies and best practices

As part of the child widows questionnaire, stakeholders were asked to share any stories of child widows or examples of best practices in supporting them which are given below.

Case 1: Eunice (Kenya)

Eunice was married off at the age of twelve to her forty-two year old brother in-law. Eunice's older sister had died leaving behind five children. Culturally, Eunice's family was expected to provide a replacement wife for the widower to take care of her late sister's children. Eunice's family decided she would fulfill the role of the replacement wife. By the time Eunice was seventeen years old, she had three children of her own, plus five from her sister, making a total of eight children. One of Eunice's children was born with severe disability because his arms and legs had not fully developed.

A few years later, her husband died of HIV/AIDS, and Eunice became a HIV positive widow. At her tender age, Eunice is facing stigma associated with HIV and having to care for eight children including one with disability. She survives by doing odd jobs, and sometimes she engages in sex work in order to provide food for her children. Some of her late sister's children who are older than her beat and verbally abuse her. Although the world views Eunice as a widow and an adult woman, Eunice is a seventeen year old child who has been betrayed by all the people who were supposed to take care of her, and she has been forced to carry a burden too heavy for her to bear.

Case 2: Sylvia (Kenya)

Sylvia was fourteen years old when she was married off by her parents in order to earn money for her brother through the bride price for her marriage. By the age of sixteen, Sylvia had given birth to her first child. Her husband, who was working in Nairobi as a night security guard, was murdered, and Sylvia became a widow at age sixteen. Culturally, Sylvia was to be inherited by the brother of her late husband. REEP through its paralegals became involved and stopped the inheritance (levirate) marriage. Sylvia was instead returned to her parents' home. Her mother agreed to take care of the baby while REEP took Sylvia back to school. Today, Sylvia has completed her high school education, and, if the funds are available, Sylvia will attend college to get further training so that she can compete favorably in the job market or become self-employed.

Case 3: Democratic Republic of Congo

DRC is one of countries in Africa where the number of widows has greatly increased. The death of a husband in a rural community has tragic consequences. One example is a sixteen year old girl of who got married accidentally. The village had organized a function which went on late into the night, so she was not able to return home and decided to spend the night in the village where the event took place. A man came and offered to let her stay at his house as it was nearby, and he told her that she would be safe in the house. The girl accepted. That night the man told the girl that he was not married, but he had two young children. When the girl asked about his wife, the man said that his wife had died during the birth of their second child. The girl decided to help the man with the two children. They spent a week together after which the man decided to marry her. She became pregnant quickly and gave birth to a child. Three months later, the man died after being slaughtered by rebels. She was left alone as a child widow with three children to raise. Fortunately, the widow's family decided to take care of their daughter and her children, so she was able to resume school and is now planning to go to university.

The girl faced many challenges in her life from being a young mother and parent after a short-lived marriage to being separated from her baby (the late husband's family took the baby after one year). The community decided to start a peer group for widows, so that they could meet each other and freely discuss their challenges and share experiences during this critical period in their lives. If one day they find a partner, it will be good for them to be able to sustain their activities, and they can also help the community.

Case 4: Democratic Republic of Congo

In rural villages in the DRC, girls are often married early, usually as soon as their breasts develop and their faces become more beautiful, regardless of the age of the girl. The respondent visited Northern Congo, where many girls are single women, most of them widows. The reality is that many of their husbands have died due to sickness, civil war, and kidnappings. As the girls are still young (16 or 17 years of age), their families often take them back home and help them start a new life, usually without any inheritance.

We try to help girls return to school, but those from the remote villages have instead asked to be provided with a workshop where they could carry out their handicraft activities while we are trying to teach them to read and write. There is no help or support from the outside, but we try to coordinate activities and search for local funds to pay for room hire and materials such as chalk. Many of the young girls learn to make their own handicrafts to sell.

Case 5: Afghanistan – Data from the Independent Human Rights Commission

کمیسیون مستقل حقوق بشر افغانستان ریاست اجراییه اداری		د افغانستان د بشر د حقوقو خپلواک کمیسیون د اجراییه ریاست اداری
Refer no:	16 جوزا 1381	شماره مسلسل:
Date: / /	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission	تاریخ: / /

The translation of a case (child widow) such as:

A 16-year - old woman named Referred to one of the AIHRC offices in Afghanistan's northern zone in January 2019, saying: " Five years ago, at my father's request, I married a man named The result of our marriage is a boy of two years. In one of last year's suicide attacks, my husband was martyred and I became a widow. After the martyrdom of my husband, his family members, and especially the brother of my husband, subjected me to violence. My husband's brother threatened me to take my son and throw me out of the home if I don't marry her. I was scared and escaped with my son from my house.

The family of my father doesn't accept me. I don't have breadwinner and shelter. I had to visit the AIHRC. Please do not officialize my case, just save my life and support me financially. " AIHRC documented the case and introduced it to the Department of Labor and Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled by a letter in order to better support the case of the victim. Now this woman is supported by the said department and is enrolled in programs of vocational training.

End

Database of Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission(AIHRC)

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

The practical guidance provided below is based on the responses received to the child widows questionnaire, from which several key topics were identified as essential to improving the living conditions, safety, well-being and independence of child widows. These topics primarily address action which can be taken at a local level as change to support child widows must be initiated at the community level. The practical guidance offered below can be tailored to suit the local context in each country, as the ultimate aim is to offer those working on women and children a useful tool to support child widows.

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR SUPPORTING CHILD WIDOWS

<p>Acknowledge the existence of child widows and their rights and needs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Recognize that child widows exist but have not yet been acknowledged as a vulnerable group in need of support. b) Acknowledge that they have rights as well as needs. c) Recognise their need for access to child-friendly justice. d) Recognise they are not a homogeneous group and include girls who have eloped in 'love marriages', virgin widows, Boko Haram, ISIS and Taliban widows etc. e) Create platforms to listen to child widows' voices so that they do not suffer silently in the margins of society. f) Raise awareness of child widows and their human rights through local and national campaigns.
<p>Conduct research</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Conduct research to collect local and national data on child widows. b) Use this to raise awareness and form clear policies on addressing the issue.
<p>Meet their basic needs through dedicated one-stop centres</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Create one stop centres where child widows can access all services in one place (healthcare services including sexual and reproductive health, legal, psychological, emotional and spiritual support). b) Recognise their need and right to play. Create spaces where they can be allowed to behave as children and also be taught to balance their childhood needs for recreational play with their adult responsibilities of being young mothers. Ensure they are separated from adult women sometimes to avoid being treated as adults. c) Meet child widows' basic needs for safety, food, shelter and clothing. d) Provide legal assistance to obtain vital documents e.g. birth registration certificates for them and their children, marriage certificates, and documents required to claim their inheritance and custody rights. e) Protect them from all forms of violence.

<p>Provide flexible education systems and non-discriminatory re-entry policies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Offer educational opportunities to give child widows a second chance to acquire formal schooling or vocational training. b) Ensure inclusive education policies that do not discriminate against married, divorced, pregnant or widowed girls and provide childcare facilities for those with children to enable mothers to attend school. c) Provide child widows with basic human rights education. d) Teach child mothers parenting skills (child nutrition, childhood illnesses and hygiene practices) and help them understand their responsibility for supporting the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of their child. e) Create special classes for child widows where they can meet peers, engage in recreational activities, exchange experiences, voice their collective concerns, acquire resilience and build a support network which is essential for their well-being and integration.
<p>Provide economic empowerment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Offer child widows economic empowerment through vocational training to improve their employment prospects. b) Provide entrepreneurial skills and access to credit/loans, financial literacy and IT skills. c) Help them find paid employment to become financially independent e.g. through mentorship and building networks. d) Teach them life skills: confidence building, assertiveness training, negotiation skills, financial literacy and critical thinking, etc. e) Encourage girls to become financially independent and not rely solely on marriage for their livelihood. f) Ensure their environment is safe and they are protected from all forms of violence at work, home, school and in the community and ensure their mobility is not restricted.
<p>Mobilise local communities to stop child marriage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Criminalise early marriage and ban harmful traditional practices. b) Use all communication channels to change social attitudes by explaining the serious human rights consequences of child marriage as a crime and a form of violence against women and the harm it does to girls and communities. c) Provide economic support to poor families at risk of marrying girls early. d) Make it mandatory for schools and health agencies to report any girls at risk of marriage. e) Make it easy to report child marriages. f) Convene local committees to stop child marriage including girls themselves, parents, teachers, doctors, village elders, religious leaders and other influencers.
<p>Integrate child widows into society in a holistic way.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Ensure that solutions for child widows are community driven and include consultations with child widows themselves whose needs and welfare must be central in any interventions. b) Provide opportunities for child widows to meet peers, build friendships, engage in recreational play which is essential for their well-being and integration. c) Involve all stakeholders - religious and community leaders, tribal chiefs, church groups, NGOs, healthcare workers, teachers, local Government (e.g. health, child welfare, etc.) d) Meet all their needs (mental, physical, legal, economic, emotional and spiritual), protect them and their children from violence and establish a sense of belonging. e) Ensure services are coordinated and collaborative and not duplicated and competitive. f) Accompany child widows on their healing journey as it is a process requiring support over time. g) Encourage their social acceptance and remove stigma, discrimination and harmful traditional practices (HTPs).
<p>Implement locally States Parties obligations to protect child widows.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Recognise that under the CRC and other Human Rights instruments, States Parties have a duty to protect child widows and provide services. b) Local governments should ban child marriage and set and enforce the minimum age of marriage at 18. c) Local government should provide long term, adequate resources to deliver all services for child widows. d) Local government should monitor and evaluate services and have clear lines of responsibility and accountability.

Please see page 43 for a visual representation of the practical guidance for supporting child widows which corresponds to the above table.

DISCUSSION

6.1 Awareness of child widows

This research is the first of its kind to determine the general level of awareness of the plight of child widows, their needs and how to support them. It is based on data collected from (1) a group of stakeholder who were already known to be aware of child widows as well as (2) others who, it was believed, might know about them through working in related areas such as child marriage prevention, widowhood or women's and children's rights. Further data was obtained from the World Pulse website.

The research indicates that child widows exist at least in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burundi, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, India, Kenya, Liberia, Nepal, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Syria and Uganda. As widowhood is linked to marriage, it is plausible that wherever the practice of child marriage occurs, there may also be child widows.

The findings suggest that there is little awareness of child widows except among the small group of organisations which actively support them, academics who conduct research and individuals with personal contact with child widows. This lack of awareness of child widows may be attributed to their small number compared to child brides, the illegal nature of child marriage and the fact that child widows themselves may wish to keep their status a secret as to not jeopardise their hopes of re-marriage. Some child widows are known to isolate themselves for fear of abuse and accusations of murdering their husbands.

6.2 Child widows' needs

Child widows have many needs specific to their intersectional identities as children, girls, mothers, and widows, thus they must be recognised as vulnerable children with rights as well as needs. Their status is a direct consequence of child marriage which is a violation of their human rights, and so the international community has an obligation to protect and support them, including by placing them on the UN agenda.

Despite protections guaranteed by the CRC, child widows' rights may be undermined upon marriage due to the notion that they have already attained majority, regardless of their age. Hence the CRC must address this inconsistency to protect the rights of child widows who face multiple forms of discrimination and other violations of their rights.

The immediate and long-term needs of child widows must be met effectively. Initially, they may require assistance to meet their basic survival needs of safety, shelter, food, clothing and medical care. They may also need financial assistance as they likely have neither income nor education or employment skills. This assistance is particularly important if they have children or are pregnant. In the longer term, they will need support to complete their education, acquire livelihood training or business startup skills with a view to become financially independent.

One example of a successful vocational skills training program is offered by Women for Human Rights, Single Women's Group in Nepal. This organization helps widows gain independence, access justice and fight for their rights with a united voice. It offers programmes to help make widows and child widows self-sufficient and independent through vocational skills such as tailoring, mushroom growing, embroidery, and shoe making. These programmes have allowed thousands of widows to earn a living and provide for themselves and their children (Women for Human Rights, 2010).

6.2.1 Education

Supporting child widows return to school is an important step in their rehabilitation as they will need education, qualifications and job experience in order to earn a living. However, the education system must be flexible and meet the needs of the girls themselves, especially if they are adolescent mothers. In reality, returning girls to school is often difficult. This was highlighted in Syria where discriminatory policies prevented pregnant girls and adolescent mothers from returning to school, which is a violation of their human rights.

Child widows—like all girls—have a right to education regardless of whether they have been married, have children, are pregnant or widowed, yet in many countries, schools follow discriminatory policies which exclude girls due to morality issues regarding pregnancy outside of wedlock.

Some progressive governments have introduced measures to address these barriers to returning to school together with the root causes of teenage pregnancies and school dropouts. These include providing free access to primary and secondary education, social and financial support to help adolescent mothers and girls at risk of dropping out of school and accommodating the special needs of young mothers attending school, such as allowing time for breast-feeding or to attend health clinics. A flexible education system should be offered, allowing girls the choice of attending morning or evening classes, and nurseries should be established near schools to provide childcare. School-based counselling services should also be provided to pregnant girls and adolescent mothers. The school should facilitate access to sexual and reproductive health services, including comprehensive sexuality education and access to a range of contraceptive methods (Human Rights Watch, 2018). These progressive measures make education more accessible to vulnerable girls from all backgrounds and should be considered as a useful model for helping child widows complete their education.

The World Bank, which promotes the right of all girls to education, recently withdrew a loan of 300 million USD given to Tanzania because Tanzanian schools expel around 8,000 pregnant girls a year, sending a clear message that such discriminatory policies were unacceptable.

6.2.2 Access to Justice

Child widows need access to justice and protection under the law from all forms of violence including physical, sexual abuse, rape, domestic, psychological and verbal abuse, ostracism, as well as from economic exploitation, prostitution and human trafficking. Child widows rarely have access to their inheritance, are often evicted from their homes and are usually unaware of their human rights. Some child widows may also be coerced into harmful mourning and burial rituals, which push them into non-consensual sexual relations, while others are required to remain widows for the rest of their lives as they are denied the right to re-marry. These injustices can only be remedied through child-friendly justice systems and greater enforcement of laws protecting children. Often there is no mechanism to hear child widows' voices in any such disputes, and they may fear retaliation from relatives. Some may require legal assistance to obtain vital documents such as birth certificates and marriage license for them and their children to claim their inheritance or access services.

6.2.3 Healthcare

Access to healthcare for child widows and their children is also vital, especially for young mothers who may need information about healthy nutrition for their child, good hygiene practices as well as detecting and treating childhood diseases, dealing with common accidents, recognising the need for medical help, vaccinations, etc. They may also need access to sexual and reproductive health education and services which must be accessible, affordable and delivered in a non-judgmental and adolescent-friendly way.

6.2.4 Acceptance and support

Many child widows may be on their own and need to be integrated into society in a holistic way, taking into account their unique set of needs from material support to spiritual guidance and social acceptance. They deserve to experience a sense of belonging to a family and community and to be allowed to live their lives with dignity and free from discrimination.

These findings highlight the importance of social support for child widows through building friendships with peers in addition to reintegration into their families and communities. The importance of integrating children into families is already well recognised by many organisations. The SOS village scheme which operates in many countries to support young children has a mother figure at its centre who takes care of the children to make them feel a part of a loving family within a wider community (SOS Villages International).

The importance of a mother figure also emerged as part of a programme introduced in the aftermath of cyclone Odisha which hit India, to rehabilitate victims (widows, destitute orphans and children as well as the elderly and persons with disability). Here, the need to empower women and children and to challenge the patriarchy was recognised. The campaign was implemented by ActionAid in collaboration with the Government of India, the Government of Orissa, Nature's Club, UNICEF and local NGOs. Each shelter was supervised by a community care volunteer, usually a young local girl, and had a "link mother" to care for children who had lost one or both parents and also the elderly (Prayas, 2016).

The community care volunteers were trained in primary healthcare, psychosocial counseling and play therapy for children. Children were provided with food, clothing, healthcare and counseling support and also books and play materials were offered together with recreational activities including local songs, dance and sports. The programme also provided training: in confidence building, stress reduction, group discussions on parenting skills, effective hygiene and waste management, children's right to education and parent education. The success of the program was attributed to adopting a highly child-centred approach. Such models could be adapted for the care of child widows in humanitarian and other settings.

Many of the services child widows require could be provided under one roof in one-stop centres to provide integrated support. However, any services must be community-driven, based on consultations with child widows and adequately resourced by local and national governments. Services for child widows should be coordinated with all partners to provide holistic care, including religious groups which are present in many communities and can and do offer much needed spiritual guidance as well as many other types of support such as healthcare and vocational training. Faith-based organisations are especially important because of their unifying power even in remote, difficult to access areas, making such organisations ideally placed to help vulnerable groups such as child widows.

6.2.5 The right to play

A child's right to play emerged as an important need and right and thus is a crucial element of any support offered to child widows. This study highlights that the right to play is sometimes overlooked in times of crisis despite its importance to child development. Therefore, purpose-built safe recreational facilities appropriate for the age of the girls should be provided to allow child widows the opportunity to play while separating them from older widows, thus ensuring that the young widows will be treated more like the children they are, rather than adult widows. At other times, of course, it may be beneficial for child widows to have the protection and guidance of older widows.

A child's right to play is set out in Article 31 of the CRC which states that "States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts." This right to play is also promoted by UNICEF which states that play and sport are not luxuries but rather essential activities in which every child has a right to participate. Through play, children can learn important and even life-saving lessons as well as acquire skills necessary to live together peacefully (UNICEF, 2014). The importance of learning

through play is also seen in the Girl Guides and Scouts movements.

The importance of play to children's well-being, development and survival is well recognised as an intrinsic part of healthy human development (IPA, 2016). Through play children learn how to socialise with peers and thus contribute to developing the culture of their communities. Moreover, given that 264 million children do not attend school, play is an important way for children to learn about the world around them (UNESCO, 2017).

Regular play in natural environments has been shown to have a positive impact on children's sense of well-being, fitness levels, resilience, cognitive functioning and motor ability (Gill, 2014; Soderstrom 2013 in IPA discussion paper). Moreover, outdoor play can strengthen their ability to cope with stress as well as help children learn to care for and protect the natural world.

In the context of conflict, humanitarian or natural disasters, play is often given a lower priority than the provision of food, shelter and medicines. However, in these situations opportunities for play, recreation and cultural activity can have a significant therapeutic and rehabilitative effect in helping children to regain a semblance of normality after experiencing trauma (Fearn and Howard 2012 in IPA paper). Given the many benefits of children engaging in play, games, sports and other recreational activities with peers, it is important that parents, teachers, humanitarian workers and others recognise and promote the right to play provided for in Article 31 of the CRC (IPA, 2016). Play and recreation can go a long way towards allowing child widows to reclaim some of their lost childhood.

6.3 How to best support child widows

After considering the immediate and long term needs of child widows, it is important to discuss the research findings from this study on how to meet the needs of child widows at the international, national and local levels to offer guidance to all stakeholders.

6.3.1 International

At the international level, there is a clear need to acknowledge the existence of child widows and their rights and needs in order to place them on the UN agenda. Despite the multiple forms of discrimination and abuse child widows face, their rights and needs are insufficiently addressed in important policy-setting documents such as the SDGs which aspire to the principle of "leave no one behind." Although the SDGs vow to end child marriage by 2030, child widows are not mentioned despite the fact that many of the SDGs directly affect them—from poverty to lack of food security, shelter, education and gender inequality.

Neither are child widows mentioned in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and there is only limited reference to them in CEDAW, although there is a joint recommendation between the CRC and CEDAW which would broadly cover them. Although child widows are children, once married, regardless of their age, they are often considered to have attained majority and may lose their protection as children under the CRC. Hence the importance of CEDAW for protecting child widows against the many forms of discrimination they face. It is encouraging to know that the CRC committee is currently making efforts to standardise the minimum age of marriage at 18.

Child widows need to be heard and empowered to participate in all spheres of life. Disaggregated data should be collected to understand their ages, locations and needs. States Parties should be reminded of their obligations under the CRC, CEDAW and other Treaty Bodies to protect child widows as vulnerable children. Since child widows are a consequence of child marriage, efforts must be intensified to eradicate child marriage, including strengthening civil registration systems to capture all births, deaths and marriages and criminalising those involved in early marriages. All relevant UN instruments must be ratified, implemented and unified to protect child widows, including enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance. The involvement of all UN stakeholders is important including relevant UN Special Rappor-

teurs, UN Women, UNICEF and others. Poverty must be recognised as a key driver of child marriage and should be addressed through the SDGs and other relevant mechanisms. The support given to child widows should be included in all human rights reporting mechanisms, such as the CRC, CEDAW and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), etc.

6.3.2 National

At the national level, there must be clear government commitments supported by well-resourced policies in their national action plans to address child marriage and child widows, including establishing 18 as the minimum age for all marriages. Laws must be introduced and enforced to protect child widows, and discriminatory inheritance laws should be repealed, and legal reforms introduced. Harmful traditional practices including child marriage, harmful mourning and burial rituals and polygamy must be prohibited. It is essential that free compulsory primary and secondary education be provided, and financial assistance given to poor families at risk of marrying girls early. School re-entry policies must be non-discriminatory against pregnant, married or widowed adolescent girls who should be encouraged and supported to resume their education. School dropouts must be monitored closely with a view to re-introducing them into the education system.

National campaigns should be organised to raise awareness of the negative impact of child marriage and child widows amongst parents in communities as well as in schools, universities, workplaces and amongst healthcare workers and religious groups. The sharing of best practices which have brought about positive change should be encouraged as much can be learned from these successes as well as some of the challenges.

6.3.3 Local

At the local level, the following guidance is offered for supporting child widows based on the findings from this study:

1. Acknowledge the existence of child widows and their rights and needs.
2. Provide them with child-friendly access to justice.
3. Meet their basic needs through dedicated one-stop centres.
4. Provide flexible education systems and non-discriminatory re-entry policies.
5. Provide economic empowerment to increase their agency and independence.
6. Mobilise local communities to stop child marriage.
7. Integrate child widows into society in a holistic way.
8. Implement locally States Parties obligations to protect child widows.
9. Conduct research on child widows.

These key themes reflect the importance of addressing the issue of child widows within a human rights framework which first and foremost acknowledges the existence of child widows and recognises that they have rights as well as needs. Presently, they are invisible in society and absent from the UN agenda, and that must change if this group of vulnerable children is ever to receive the support they so urgently need. As a priority, child widows should be geographically mapped and statistically recorded at national level. This data should be collated and widely shared to help raise awareness and formulate policies to address the issue.

Many child widows find themselves destitute after the death of their husband as he was likely the family breadwinner and met their needs for food, shelter, clothing, general care and financial support. As social protection is uncommon, and child widows are unlikely to inherit from their husband's estate, their

basic requirements must be met in a different way. An ideal solution would be to meet all these needs under one roof in the form of a one-stop centre. Once child widows immediate needs have been met, they require longer term support to help reintegrate them into society. It is important that they are given opportunities to return to school to complete their education. If they are single mothers without family support, they will also need childcare facilities while they attend school. Any structural barriers to including married, widowed, divorced, pregnant or abandoned girls at every level of education must be removed through open and inclusive school re-admission policies. The provision of education should be interpreted in its widest sense to include non-formal teaching methods as well as the provision of practical skills. Girls also need basic human rights education so that they understand their rights and entitlements as well as obligations as children, mothers and widows. Child mothers may need parenting skills to understand how to best care for their children (correct nutrition, proper hygiene, a basic understanding of childhood diseases and when they need to seek medical attention etc.). Some older girls may need access to income generating opportunities such as livelihood training to become financially independent to support themselves and their children.

As child widows are a direct consequence of child marriage, efforts must be increased to stop the practice through mobilizing local communities to campaign against child marriage. In addition, child marriage should be criminalized in every region and community. Parents who arrange child marriages and adult men who marry young girls should be prosecuted. This is consistent with measures taken in some Indian States where all actors in the marriage market such as those who perform child marriage ceremonies, provide wedding catering services or room hire facilities and marriage brokers, etc. are liable to prosecution and fines.

Greater awareness of child marriage and its harmful consequences is also required. To address child marriage, all stakeholders must be involved including girls themselves, their parents, teachers, parliamentarians, religious leaders, village elders, men and boys, healthcare and other professionals. Social protections should be provided to poor families at risk of marrying their daughters early and to girls themselves.

Child widows in some countries live on the margins of society as they are discriminated against due to the belief that they are responsible for the death of their husband. They are often shunned, abused and exploited by others and in need of access to justice, protection and nurturing. Thus in addition to material and financial help, they require acceptance, companionship, and emotional support. Most will need time to heal from their trauma and may benefit from spiritual guidance and care by respected church leaders and religious groups. Faith leaders have an important role in shaping community attitudes and can be invaluable for the reintegration of child widows into society, especially in hard to reach populations.

Child widows need to be re-integrated into society in a holistic way without discrimination or exploitation and through engaging all relevant stakeholders and using community driven interventions which involve child widows themselves. Child widows need to feel a sense of belonging as well as having access to many types of support: mental, spiritual, economic, healthcare and legal assistance to access their inheritance. They may also need assistance to access civil registration documents for themselves and their children such as birth, marriage and death certificates, rights to property, custody etc. The local community must learn to accept them and allow them to live a life free from violence, stigmatisation and discrimination.

All communities must recognise and acknowledge that child widows are children and not adults and have different needs. Child widows should therefore be provided with purpose-built recreational facilities to give them the right to learn and develop through play like other children. It is important to separate child widows from adult women for some periods to ensure that child widows have the opportunity to reclaim and enjoy their childhood within the limits of their difficult life circumstances. Child widows should be encouraged to socialise in safe spaces with their peers to exchange and share their life experiences, create a support network, learn from each other and build resilience. When empowered to use their voice, child widows will become better equipped to claim their rights and learn to overcome adversity. When they are given this support that they so desperately need, child widows will become agents of change for their communities. Even a small change to a girl's life can have immense benefits for those around her and also, mostly importantly, can alter her own journey from child bride, to widow, and eventually back to herself.

6.4 Conclusion

This report is the first attempt to systematically gather information on child widows' needs and how to best support this largely neglected group of children. Made vulnerable by their young age, gender and widowhood status as well as their lack of education and employment skills, child widows have remained mostly invisible in their communities and overlooked in UN instruments. From the literature and this report, it is evident that more research on child widows is needed. This report serves as a starting point for advocacy and the development of policies and programs to support child widows. It is hoped that this guidance will be a useful tool to support child widows within a human rights framework at the international, national and local levels in a holistic and sustainable way.

GUIDANCE FOR SUPPORTING CHILD WIDOWS

<p>Adopt a human rights-based approach involving all UN Treaty Bodies to protect child widows, including the CRC, CEDAW, UPR, the Beijing Platform for Action and the SDGs</p>		
<p>Acknowledge their existence, rights and needs</p>	<p>Ratify, reform & enforce laws to protect child widows. Provide child-friendly access to justice</p>	<p>Provide safety, food, shelter, clothing, legal assistance and health care services</p>
<p>Provide flexible and free compulsory education with inclusive school re-entry policies</p>	<p>Offer economic empowerment through vocational and entrepreneurial skills</p>	<p>Protect against all violence and harmful traditional practices</p>
<p>Holistically integrate child widows into society</p>	<p>Government to fund all services, with monitoring, evaluation and accountability</p>	<p>Conduct research and collect disaggregated data</p>
<p>Success will rest on government commitment and financing, meaningful engagement of all stakeholders, sustainable, child-centred, community-driven interventions in a spirit of collaboration while sharing best practices</p>		

Appendix: Participating Organisations (excluding those which requested to remain anonymous)

Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
Cho Ngafor Vocational Foundation, Cameroon
Common Action for Gender Development, Cameroon
Community Action, Uganda
Environment First Charitable Society of Ethiopia
Faith based organisation, Democratic Republic of Congo
Human Rights Expert, Nigeria
Institute for Global Health, University College, London, UK
International Alliance of Women, Switzerland
Law Institute, Ghana
Member of European Parliament, Brussels and Strasbourg
Methodist Church, Tanzania
MoMEC Edutainment Centre, Tanzania
National Council of African Women, South Africa
National Council of Women, France
National Council of Women, Tunisia
National Human Rights Commission Nepal
Network for Community Development, Uganda
Organisation for Women Empowerment, Liberia
Overseas Development Institute (ODI), UK
Rona Foundation, Kenya
Rural Economic Enhancement Programme, Kenya
Saathi, NGO Nepal
Sahiyo, NGO India
The Guild of Service, India
The Humanity for Orphans, Youth and Widows Initiative, Kenya
Theological College, Malawi
UN Women, Nepal
Widows Development Organisation, Nigeria
Widows for Peace Through Democracy, UK
Women and Children Legal Research Foundation, Afghanistan
Women for Human Rights, Single Women's Group, Nepal
World Council of Churches, Switzerland
World Federation of Methodists and Unity Church Women
World Vision International, Syria

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