



## **Socio-Cultural and Economic Challenges of Remarriage for Elderly Widows and Widowers in Nepal**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Elderly widows and widowers in Nepal are often advised to refrain from remarriage due to social stigma and financial hardships caused by cultural beliefs and financial reliance. These barriers limit their freedom, which affect their general well-being and social inclusion. In these regards, this study aimed to explore the barriers to remarriage among elderly widows and widowers in Nepal, focusing on cultural, economic, emotional, and family factors together with examining the societal attitudes toward the elderly people's remarriage and analyzing the perceptions of older adults on this issue. This study has employed an explanatory sequential mixed-method approach. Similarly, the quantitative data were used to explore the perception of them and the qualitative data were used to study in depth through the open ended questionnaire to support the quantitative findings. Sample was selected through the purposive and snowball sampling method. Data were statistically analyzed by using cross tabulation, frequency distribution, and descriptive statistics. Case studies were analyzed to find their alignment with the qualitative data findings. The findings of the study highlighted the significant barriers to remarriage, including social stigma, financial instability, lack of family support, and

emotional attachment to the late spouse's family. A fear of societal criticism appeared as the leading societal discouragement factor. Further, widows, in particular, faced cultural and family challenges, contrasts to widowers who encountered fewer barriers. Although remarriage can improve emotional health and lessen loneliness, older persons are discouraged from doing so by family restriction, financial concerns, and social stigma.

Cultural changes and awareness-raising initiatives are crucial to improving the quality of life for elderly widows and widowers in Nepal and normalizing remarriage.

**KEYWORDS:** Remarriage, social stigma, widows, widowers

## INTRODUCTION

The most important challenge of today is the increase of older population in the world. It is a similar case for Nepal, too. According to the 2021 census, there are 2.97 million older people in Nepal, marking a 38.2% increase compared to the 2011 census. The older population now constitutes 10.21% of Nepal's total population. Similarly, the number of widows and widowers in Nepal is 4.5 % of the total population, which consist of 826,147 widows and 255,008 widowers (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021). With the death of a spouse in old age, the social participation of the elderly decreases; living alone is associated with a high risk of death and an impact on all aspects of health i.e. physical, mental and social in the elderly (Maghare et al., 2022). With the increase in life expectancy, the number of older adults facing the challenges of widowhood has also risen. While remarriage can provide emotional and social benefits, many widows and widowers encounter unique challenges that hinder their ability or desire to remarry (Car & Boerner, 2013). Remarriage can offer emotional support, companionship, and improved quality of life for these individuals (Carr & Wolfe, 2016). The aforementioned discussion shows the presence of significant number of old age single people at present.

The difficulties faced by elderly widows in Nepal were an illustration of broader development issues including poverty and gender inequality, which are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 and 5 respectively. The problems are firmly anchored in sociocultural norms, economic marginalization, and systemic inequalities. Widows' capacity to get married again and fully engage in society is restricted by the social humiliation, unstable finances, and mental pain that they frequently endure (Khanal et al., 2020; Shrestha, 2020). These obstacles should be studied through a development perspective, highlighting the necessity of comprehensive solutions that address systemic injustices and advance social inclusion.

The issue of remarriage among elderly widows and widowers is deeply interlinked in socio-cultural, economic, and psychological frameworks that shapes individual's decision making. The relationship between remarriage challenges with elderly widows and widowers in actual life have been explained by several theories. A few but not limited to these theories are social exchange theory, theory of stigma, and feminist theory. The social exchange theory posits that individuals engage in relationship based on the perceived benefits and cost which further seeks to maximize rewards in one hand and minimize losses in another hand. In the context of remarriage too, both widow and widowers give high value to the emotional, financial, and social advantage of remarriage despite having its potential drawbacks like societal disapproval, financial instability, criticism, and family conflicts (Cook & Rice, 2006). In the patriarchal society like Nepal, older women may realize remarriage as unfavorable due to the risk of respecting children and losing inheritance right (Shrestha, 2020). On the contrary, remarriage may be beneficial to men as it offers a true companionship and caregiving support in their aging life (Shrestha, 2020). Additionally, the theory of stigma as explained by Goffman's (1963) indicates the negative societal perception towards remarriage, taking widows in particular. Though remarriage is legally accepted in Nepal, widowhood is still accompanied by cultural taboos that discourage remarriage (Khanal et al., 2020). Women, in particular, face more social stigma as they are expected to remain loyal to their deceased spouses for their entire life.

Conversely, most widowers encounter less social restriction as they even are allowed for remarriage within the years of their wife's death. Thus, the stigma of widow remarriage is reinforced by religious and cultural beliefs that associate a widow's remarriage with humiliation (Zahra, 2018). Moreover, the feminist perspective provides a light on the gendered dynamics on remarriage. The feminists argue that widowhood affects women disproportionately due to the structural inequalities in inheritance laws, financial independence, and social mobility (Chatterjee, 2017). Widows in Nepali societies experience more economic marginalization which further compelled them to stay with extended families for support. This situation ultimately limits their autonomy in taking a remarriage decision (Shrestha, 2020). The traditional norms and values had provided more freedom to men than women in regard to remarriage which is a critical perspective on gender disparities in the remarriage pattern, highlighting how the patriarchal structures disadvantage many widows.

Thus, the challenges faced by older widows and widowers regarding remarriage are complex and deeply influenced by cultural, economic, emotional, and social factors. In South Asian countries like Nepal, India, and Pakistan, the cultural norms significantly shape attitudes toward remarriage. In India, for instance, the stigma associated with widowhood leads many widows to experience social isolation and emotional turmoil, as they often feel pressured to remain single in honor of their deceased spouses (Srinivasan, 2015). Similarly, in Nepal, cultural expectations dictate that widows should not remarry, with many viewing the act as a betrayal of their late husbands (Khanal et al., 2020). In Pakistan, the concept of 'izzat' (honor) plays a crucial role in shaping the societal attitudes, where widows face intense scrutiny and judgment for considering remarriage (Zahra, 2018). In contrast, some African cultures, such as in Nigeria, display a more lenient attitude toward remarriage. Okonjo (2019) explores widows may face a societal pressure to remarry primarily for economic stability, though this can also lead to a loss of personal autonomy (Afolabi, 2021). This indicated the persistence of diverse challenges for remarriage in old age.

Additionally, the economic factors are another significant consideration that influence the remarriage decisions of older individuals. Many widows in South Asia experience financial instability after losing their spouses, which can drive them toward the idea of remarriage as a means of economic security (Chatterjee, 2017). In Nepal, economic marginalization further complicates the situation for widows, making remarriage a good option despite the associated cultural stigma (Shrestha, 2020). Conversely, in various African contexts, economic motivations also play a pivotal role. The studies indicate that widows may feel compelled to remarry to secure financial support and improve their living conditions. For instance, this study was identified by Moyo (2021). Although achieving economic independence can empower some to resist the societal pressures (Kagethe, 2018), there are economic challenges and opportunities of remarriages.

The emotional and psychological barriers further complicate the decision to remarry. Widows and widowers often grapple with feelings of grief, guilt, and apprehension about moving on after the loss of their spouse (Gurung et al., 2022). In South Asia, a study shows that people feel guilty at the thought of remarriage, driven by cultural beliefs that emphasize loyalty to the deceased (Khanal et al., 2022). In African cultures, the emotional challenges are equally prevalent, with widows frequently expressing fears of losing their autonomy in a new relationship or facing community stigma (Afolabi, 2021). The psychological impact of previous marriages can create a reluctance to enter new partnerships, further complicating the remarriage landscape.

(Moyo, 20221). Therefore, the cultural barriers also play a vital role in the perception of remarriage among the golf people.

Similarly, the role of support systems and social networks is critical in shaping the decisions of older people regarding remarriage. In South Asian contexts, the extended family dynamics can exert a significant influence, with families often pressuring widows and widowers to remain single or to remarry quickly (Zahra, 2018). In many African communities, social networks can create a more supportive environment that encourages remarriage as a means of emotional and economic stability (Okonjo, 2019). However, these networks can also reinforce traditional expectations, making a decision to remarry a complex and multifaceted process (Kangethe, 2018). Overall, the challenges to remarriage faced by older widows and widowers in South Asian and African contexts highlight the interplay of cultural, economic, emotional, and social factors in shaping their experiences and choices.

Remarriage in old age enhances the quality of life of a person. It not only brings new happiness but also leads to effective marital performance with lifetime companionship (Mangarun, 2021). In the same way, having children and a new partner in old age brings back the complete family structure which ultimately improves the wellbeing of the aged people (Mangarun, 2020). Remarriage can offer emotional support, companionship, and improved quality of life for these individuals (Carr & Wolfe, 2016). Similarly, Brown and Lin (2012) illustrate that remarriage alleviates feelings of loneliness and depression. Moreover, studies have shown that widowed individuals who remarry often report higher life satisfaction and reduced depressive symptoms as compared to those who remain single (Brown & Lin, 2012). Additionally, remarriage can enhance physical health by fostering healthier lifestyles and providing emotional support, which are comparable to the benefits experienced in the continuous marriages (Osmani et al., 2017). Social support is another critical advantage, as remarriage can expand an individual's social network, offering emotional and practical support that contributes to overall well-being (Torry, 2024). These benefits highlight the potential for remarriage to significantly enhance the quality of life for older adults.

Despite having its positive effects, challenges such as separating from families, health issues, and adapting to new social dynamics can also impact the older adults' quality of life. The aged people especially women are reluctant to remarry with the fear of separating from their children. Here, they are concerned more about their social and emotional safety, children's future, and sharing economy rather than for physical pleasure (Tiwari & Bhattarai, 2017). Thus, financial complications, such as inheritance disputes and the potential loss of benefits from a previous spouse, often discourage older adults from remarrying (Brown and Lin, 2012). Likewise, the family dynamics may become strained, with adult children resisting their parent's decision to remarry due to their inheritance or changes in the family structure (Osmani et al., 2017). Cultural and social stigmas further compound these challenges, particularly for women, as certain societies hold negative perceptions of remarriage in old age (Osmani et al., 2017). These issues underscore the complexities surrounding remarriage, which must be carefully considered before a remarriage decision. On the contrary, there are other reasons beyond remarriage that improve quality of life. Joshi et al. (2018) state that land and property ownership has a positive correlation with the quality of life in old age rather than the marital status, household size and health status. Shrestha et al. (2020) illustrate that economic marginalization further complicates the situation for old age remarriage despite the associated cultural stigma in Nepal. The negative perception of the society to the old age marriage is restricting them to register the marriage. Maghare et al. (2022)

claim that the changing data from remarriage in old age is affecting for development interventions that promote healthy aging and social support networks. Overall, breaking the social taboo of remarriage for aged people is essential. This is beneficial to both the old age people and the society that they live in.

The combination of economic insecurity and cultural stigma creates a challenging environment where the longing for companionship can be overshadowed by fears of societal judgment and rejection. As a result, older widows and widowers in Nepal face a multifaceted array of emotional, social, and economic obstacles, underscoring the necessity for a deeper understanding of their experiences and the barriers to forming new relationships. In such context, this study explores the main challenges to remarriage among elderly widows and widowers, the emotional barriers they face when considering remarriage and finally, the societal attitudes and stereotypes regarding remarriage among older adults which may impact the willingness to seek new relationships. Therefore, this study identified the main challenges to remarriage faced by elderly widows and widowers and analyze the perception of remarriage among them.

The plan of this paper is as follows: The first section introduces the study that includes the review of past studies; The second section describes the detail methodology of the study; the third section presents the results of the study and provides discussion of them; The last section concludes the study and provides the recommendations.

## RESEARCH METHODS

Based on the theoretical frameworks, including social exchange theory, theory of stigma, and feminist theory, this study explored the sociocultural, economic, and emotional factors that restrict elderly widows and widowers in Nepal from remarriage. The study illustrated how the people's decisions about getting married again are influenced by gendered dynamics, financial dependence and social standards. In light of these contexts, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by widows and widowers, particularly in the context of patriarchal structures and systemic inequalities, while aligning its findings with SDGs.

This study used the explanatory sequential mixed-method approach to uncover the lived experiences of widows and widowers, offering the insights into the socio-cultural and economic barriers that hinder their social inclusion and well-being. For this, the closed ended questionnaire including 5-points Likert scale for the perception measurement were used for the quantitative data collection and selected respondents were interviewed as a case study sample for the qualitative data collection. The study area selected was Ward No. 5 and 18 of the Pokhara Metropolitan City. This area was selected due to the researcher's convenient access and due to the diverse economic status of the area, in which, one ward lies in the urban area and another ward lies in the semi-urban area. The non-probability sampling technique was used for the sample selection. The study sample comprised both men and women who had lost their partners and remained single at the time of data collection. The sample of 30 single women were selected as the respondents of this study, using the purposive sampling technique. The snowball sampling technique was employed to find the male respondents where 13 single men were taken as the sample size. Therefore, the total sample size for the quantitative study was 43. To capture the deeper insights into the lived experiences of these women and men, four case studies were done to explore their depth experiences in regard to the challenges that they faced for a remarriage decision. The collected data were organized and coded using SPSS version 16. The cross-tabulation, frequency distribution, and descriptive statistics were calculated and plotted to visualize the

findings. The case study narratives were presented to complement the quantitative finding. The findings were discussed in reference to the theoretical grounds, related the previous studies and the researchers' insights to draw the conclusion.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the responses on the survey of closed-ended questionnaire and open-ended questionnaire were presented and highlighted in the result section. These results were interpreted, analyzed, and discussed in the discussion section.

### Results: Survey Questionnaires

This section includes the results obtained from the survey questionnaires and case studies from elderly widows and widowers.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of Respondents*

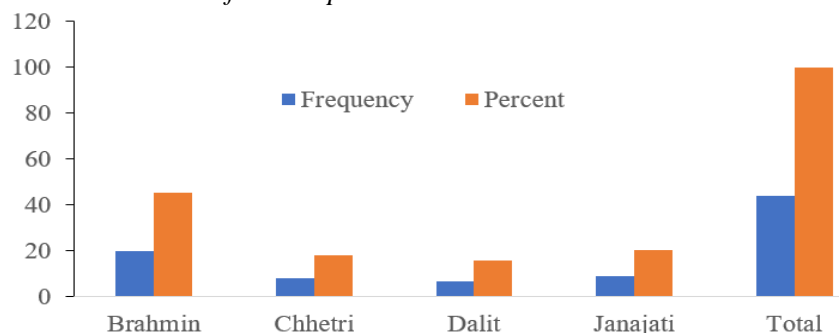
Statistics	Age of the respondents	Age at marriage of the respondents	Age at widowhood of the respondents	Total number of the birth including live and death
Mean	48.50	18.16	37.20	2.48
Std. Deviation	11.476	2.844	12.463	1.191
Minimum	26	13	4	1
Maximum	70	23	65	6
Total	44	44	44	44

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of widow and widower respondents, focusing on the variables such as age, age of marriage, age of widowhood, and the number of total births. As can be seen, the average mean age of the respondents was 48.50 years. The youngest age of respondents was 26 while the oldest one was 70 years. Similarly, the average mean year of marriage was 18.16 years with a standard deviation of 2.844 and a range of 13 to 23 years. Further, the data illustrates a larger variability of the age of widowhood with an average of 37.20 years and a standard deviation of 12.463. Additionally, the data revealed an average of 2.48 child births, including both live and deceased children, with a standard deviation of 1.191.

**Figure 1**

*The Distribution of the Respondents Based on Caste*



Source: Field Survey, 2025

The distribution of the respondents based on caste was illustrated in Figure 2. As shown in the figure, the respondents from Brahmins caste group have the largest proportion, with 45.5%. Further, the respondents from Janajati represents a fifth of total samples. Likewise, Chhetris and Dalits reflects smaller but the important portions of the group which accounts for 18.2 % and 15.9% respectively. The inclusion of multiple caste groups adds diversity to the dataset, enhancing its relevance for the socio-demographic analysis.

Table 2 illustrates the cross-tabulation of the causes of partners' death categorized by sex of the respondents. As illustrated in the table that the male respondents, the primary causes of their partners' death were diseases (7 cases, 53.8%) and accidents (6 cases, 46.2%). Regarding these diseases, uterus prolapse, bone cancer, and pregnancy complicated the issues were well pronounced by almost all of the male respondents. Interestingly, no cases of natural death, death due to alcohol, epidemics, or political insurgency were reported among the male respondents. In contrary, the female respondents reported a broader range of causes. The data reveal that the diseases were the foremost cause (8 cases, 25.8%), followed by alcohol-related deaths (8 cases, 25.8%), and accidents (8 cases, 25.8%). Additionally, 4 cases (12.9%) were died due to epidemics (e.g., COVID-19), 2 cases (6.5%) to natural death, and 1 case (3.2%) to political insurgency. Further, the total data show that diseases (15 cases, 34.1%) and accidents (14 cases, 31.8%) was the leading causes of partners' death overall, with alcohol-related deaths (8 cases, 18.2%), and epidemics (4 cases, 9.1%) also significant. Natural deaths (2 cases, 4.5%) and deaths due to political insurgency (1 case, 2.3%) were comparatively low.

**Table 2**

*The Cause of Partners' Death by Sex of the Respondents*

Gender	Cause of Partners' Death						Total
	Natural Death	Political insurgency	Disease	Epidemics )Covid-19(	Accident	Alcoholism	
Male	0	0	7	0	6	0	13
Female	2	1	8	4	8	8	31
Total	2	1	15	4	14	8	44

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Figure 2 shows the most significant challenges faced by widows and widowers while considering remarriage, which further reveals a quite complex interplay of socio-cultural, financial, and emotional factors. As can be seen, nearly one-third of the total respondents has reported as social stigma as the most prominent challenge for remarriage. Another notable result was that financial instability and lack of family support were reported by more than or equals to a fourth of the respondents. The least frequently reported that emotional attachment with the partners' family as a major challenge for considering remarriage. It is valuable to note that societal judgement and traditional belief about widowhood heavily discourage remarriage. Likewise, financial instability, as another major obstacle, indicates that economic insecurity often deters widows and widowers from remarrying, particularly when they lack independent income or resources.

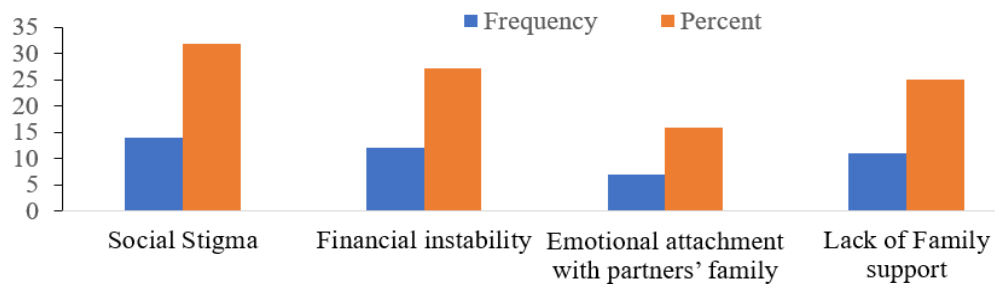
**Figure 2***Most Significant Challenges for Remarriage among Elderly Widows and Widowers**Source: Field Survey, 2025*

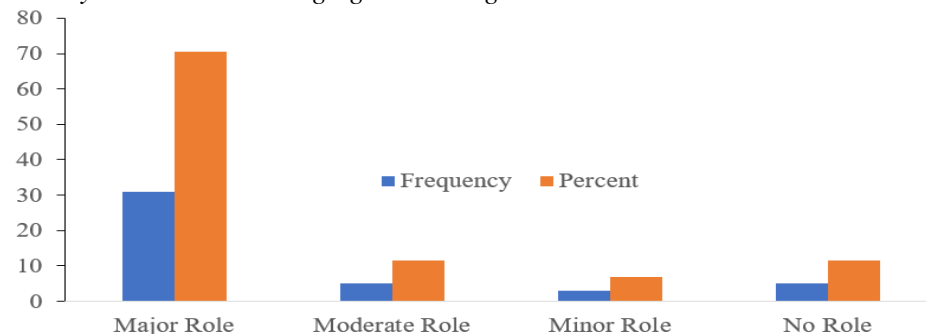
Table 3 shows the frequency distribution of the factor discouraging widows and widowers from considering remarriage. As illustrated in the data, the most common factor reported by more than half of the respondents was a fear of criticism. In the same way, more than a fifth (22.7%) respondents reported lacking a social support as another factor influencing a remarriage decision. The pressure of remaining loyal to the deceased spouse was cited by 13.6% of the total respondents indicates that widowhood is highly tied by the emotional complexities. This finding shows that societal judgement and negative perception in regard to remarriage create a considerable fear among widows and widowers.

**Table 3***Factor Discouraging Widows and Widowers from Remarriage*

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Fear of Criticism	24	54.5
Pressure of remaining loyal to deceased spouse	6	13.6
Expectation of Loneliness	4	9.1
Lack of societal support	10	22.7
Total	44	100.0

*Source: Field Survey, 2025*

Figure 3 shows the role of families in discouraging remarriage among widows and widowers, indicating the major influence of familial attitudes and behaviors on a remarriage decision.

**Figure 3***Family Roles in Discouraging Remarriage**Source: Field Survey, 2025*



As can be seen, in Figure 3, more than two-third (70.5%) of the total respondents has reported that family plays a major role in a remarriage decision among widows and widowers. In the same way, equal percentage of respondents (11.4%) has cited that family has moderate and no role in encouraging or discouraging a remarriage decision. Similarly, a minor role is reported by very few of the total respondents, indicates that these families may disapprove of remarriage but do not actively discourage.

Table 4 reveals the respondents' perceptions of remarriage among widows and widowers based on a Likert scale, with the associated statistical measures such as mean and variance. The data illustrate that the overall mean score of 2.29 on the perception of remarriage, which indicates a weak agreement towards remarriage. Further, the respondents did not accept the statement "Remarriage aligns with my cultural and religious values" with an average of 3.02. Similarly, the respondents did not accept "Children of remarried widows adjust well to their new family dynamics" with a mean value of 3.05, which suggests the presence of cultural barriers. Additionally, with the average score of 1.55 in the statement "Widows who remarry are judged less harshly now than in the past" and "Remarriage significantly improves the mental health of widows" with a mean score of 1.45 shows that the perception has changed with time in a positive direction.

**Table 4**

*Perception on Remarriage Measured in Five-Point Likert Scale*

Statements	Mean	Variance
Remarried widows are fully accepted by society	2.73	2.761
Widows who remarry face less societal stigma than those who remain single	2.36	1.958
Widows remarrying aligns with my cultural and religious values	3.02	2.162
Remarriage helps widows achieve financial security and independence	2.66	1.718
Remarried widows are treated equally and fairly within their new families	2.86	1.237
Children' of remarried widows adjust well to their new family dynamics	3.05	1.393
Widows who remarry are judged less harshly now than in the past	1.55	.765
Remarriage significantly improves the mental health of widows	1.45	.719
Widows face fewer barriers to remarriage today compared to previous generations	1.43	.623
Perception of Marriage (Mean)	2.29	.494

Source: Field Survey, 2025

### Results: Case Studies

To gain the deeper insights into the lived experiences of widows and widowers, four case studies were conducted. These cases were selected to represent the diverse socio-economic backgrounds and experiences of widowhood. The narratives of these individuals highlight a complex interplay of cultural, economic, and emotional factors that influence their decisions regarding remarriage. Below, these case studies were

presented and analyzed to complement the quantitative findings, providing a richer understanding of the challenges faced by this demographic.

### ***Case Study 1: Early Marriage, Widowhood, and Economic Hardship***

The first case study involves a 26-year-old widow from a slum area in Pokhara-18. She grew up in a low-income household with a single mother and had a limited access to education. At the age of 14, she entered into a love marriage with a man from a similarly disadvantaged background. By the age of 17, she had two children, and the family faced chronic economic hardship. Her husband migrated to Malaysia for foreign employment, but the relationship deteriorated due to mistrust and accusations of infidelity. Tragically, her husband committed suicide, leaving her to face not only the emotional pain of his death but also legal accusations of 'promotion of suicide.' Despite being innocent, she had to defend herself in court, adding to her emotional and financial burden. Currently, she works as a cleaner in Pokhara to support her two children. Despite facing significant social stigma and criticism, she expressed a desire to remarry if she could find a partner willing to accept her and her children. This case highlights an intersection of economic instability, social stigma, and emotional trauma as the barriers to remarriage. It also underscores the vulnerability of widows in the low-income settings, where the limited economic opportunities and societal judgment exacerbate their challenges.

### ***Case Study 2: Childhood Widowhood and Alcoholism***

The second case study involves a woman who became a widow at the age of 19 after losing both her parents in a road accident. She was raised by the extended family members and married at a young age, around the time of her first menstruation. Her husband struggled with chronic alcoholism, which led to his early death. She raised her two daughters in the conditions of economic hardship, without any inheritance or fixed assets from her husband. Now, living alone in a rented room, she relies on a minimal government support, which is insufficient to meet her basic needs. Despite her loneliness, she prefers her current single life over the abusive relationship she endured with her alcoholic husband. This case illustrates the long-term impact of early widowhood and economic marginalization on the widows' decisions regarding remarriage. It also highlights how the past traumatic experiences, such as domestic abuse, can shape the widows' perceptions of remarriage and their willingness to enter new relationships.

### ***Case Study 3: Young Widowhood and Societal Pressure***

The third case study features a woman who married at 20 and became a widow at 21 when her husband died in a paragliding accident. At the time of his death, she was one month pregnant. Despite a pressure from her family and friends to abort the child and remarry, she chose to keep the baby, whom she now raises as a single mother. With incomplete education, she struggles to find stable employment and faces societal judgment when seeking work outside the home. Her primary focus is on securing a better job rather than considering remarriage. This case highlights the societal pressure faced by young widows and the trade-offs they must make between economic stability and personal relationships. It also underscores the role of family dynamics and cultural expectations in shaping the widows' decisions.

#### ***Case Study 4: Domestic Abuse and Social Judgment***

The final case study involves a woman who married her neighbor at the age of 14. Her husband, who worked in a garage, developed the habits of smoking and drinking, which led to a domestic abuse. Despite having young children, she endured the years of physical violence until her husband's alcohol-induced suicide. Now, working in a Rodhi Ghar, a traditional dance and entertainment venue, she faces social judgment and gossip from her neighbors. She expressed a desire to remarry but only if she finds a partner who can accept her and her children. This case highlights the long-lasting impact of domestic abuse on the widows' perceptions of remarriage and the social stigma they face in their communities. It also illustrates the gendered nature of societal judgment, as widows are often scrutinized more harshly than widowers.

#### **Discussion**

The results of this study illustrate that the several related factors influencing the decisions of widows and widowers regarding remarriage. Cultural stigma was found as the most prominent barrier, particularly for women aligning the theory of stigma by Goffman (1963). Widows often faced societal judgment, where remarriage was perceived as disloyalty to the deceased spouse similar to the findings by Khanal et al. (2020). Similarly, Zahra (2018) also noted that the societal norms in Pakistan reinforce widowhood as a state of mourning, comparable to the attitudes found in this study's respondents. Further, financial instability was another serious challenge, particularly among widows. The lack of economic independence induced many women to rely on a familial support which often discouraging remarriage which is similar to the finding of the study by Shrestha (2020) and social exchange theory (Cook & Rice, 2006). However, similar to the suggestion of feminist perspective theory presented in the study of Chatterjee (2017), widowers in this study reported the fewer financial constraints, which reflects a gendered disparity in economic security and societal expectations. Additionally, the family resistance played a significant role as a higher number of respondents highlighted the family members' influence in discouraging remarriage. Women, in particular, faced a pressure from the adult children, who feared of changes in the family dynamics. This finding was similar to the finding of Osmani et al. (2017), which marked that the family opposition significantly impacts the widows' decisions to remarry. Furthermore, the emotional and psychological factors also impose the substantial barriers, with widows expressing guilt and apprehension about forming the new relationships similar to the finding of the study by Gurung et al. (2022). Remarkably, widowers reported the fewer emotional challenges, potentially due to the societal acceptance of remarriage for men, as noted by Okonjo (2019) in the African contexts. Despite these barriers, the study found that remarriage has the potential to improve the quality of life for the older adults. The respondents who supported remarriage emphasized its benefits, including the emotional companionship, reduced loneliness, and improved mental health. These findings are supported by the study of Brown and Lin (2012), which illustrated remarriage as alleviating depression and enhances life satisfaction.

The case studies presented above provide a nuance understanding of the barriers to remarriage among widows in Nepal. They highlight an intersection of economic instability, social stigma, and emotional trauma as the key factors influencing the widows' decisions. The first and third case studies illustrated how economic hardship and societal pressure force widows to prioritize survival and their children's well-being over remarriage. The second and fourth case studies revealed how the past experiences of

abuse and trauma shape the widows' reluctance to enter the new relationships. These narratives align with the quantitative findings of this study, which identified social stigma, financial instability, and lack of family support as the primary barriers to remarriage. They also underscore the gendered nature of these challenges as widows face more societal judgment and economic marginalization compared to widowers. From these case studies that align with the quantitative findings, a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of widows and the complex factors that influence their decisions regarding remarriage were explored.

The findings reveal that socio-cultural stigma, economic marginalization, and emotional suffering were the primary barriers to remarriage among elderly widows in Nepal. These challenges were exacerbated by the patriarchal norms and systemic inequalities, which disproportionately affect women (Chatterjee, 2017; Gurung et al., 2022). For instance, widows face societal judgment and financial dependency, limiting their autonomy and decision-making power. The case studies further illustrate how these barriers manifest in the real-life contexts of domestic abuse, lack of inheritance rights, and limited access to education and employment. In these contexts, to attain SDGs by addressing gender inequality and promoting social inclusion, there is a need of economic empowerment programs, awareness campaigns, and policy reforms.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study highlights the multifaceted challenges faced by the older widows and widowers in Nepal regarding remarriage. Social stigma, financial instability, lack of family support, and emotional barriers are the primary barriers preventing remarriage among this demographic. Widowers face fewer societal and familial restrictions while widows suffer the significant cultural and economic challenges, reflecting the gendered disparities in the societal attitudes toward remarriage. These challenges reflect the broader development issues, including gender inequality, poverty, and social exclusion, which require the holistic interventions to address. However, a perception of people regarding remarriage is changing in a positive direction. The study further reveals that there is potential of remarriage to improve the quality of life among the older adults. Emotional companionship, social support, and financial stability were identified as a significant benefice, highlighting the need to normalize remarriage as a practical option for widows and widowers. Policy recommendations include the economic empowerment programs, community-based mental health support, and legal reforms to protect the widows' rights. By aligning these efforts with the SDGs, Nepal can create a more equitable and inclusive society for its elderly population. Finally, future research should explore a long-term impact of such interventions on the widows' well-being and social participation.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

*I hereby wish to declare that I do not have any conflict of interests to disclose.*

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

*I declare that this manuscript is originally produced by me.*

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