



Widows Needs Assessment Case Study of North Cairo Social Units

By: Khaled Fawzi Safieddin

Introduction and Research problem:

Widowhood is a problem that faces women in the advanced and developing world alike. Everywhere in the world widows constitute between 7% and 16% of all adult women. However, there is shortage of data on widows which undermines our appreciation of their problems and the living conditions.

Widowhood is the main reason behind the phenomenon of female headed households. Studies point out that more than 40% of the women who head their households in advanced countries are widows, while in Arab countries, widows constitute more than two thirds of the female heads of households.

Lack of data on widows is the main obstacle affecting policies and programs to overcome their problems in Egypt. Widows are marginalized and do not have any kind of social protection, which point to the need for development approaches to estimate their needs and help them overcome material and moral deprivation through increasing their opportunities and choices and investing their assets and potentials to change their living conditions and improve the quality of their lives.

Objectives:

- Determining the economic and social needs of widows
- Determining the health and educational needs of widows
- Determining the psychological needs of widows
- Arranging the needs of widows in an order or priority
- Identifying the problems that obstruct the fulfillment of widows' needs
- Reaching recommendations and suggestions to fulfill the needs of widows.

Methodology:

This is a descriptive study seeks to evaluate the needs of widows and determine the obstacles that hinder the fulfillment of these needs. It also seeks to identify the order of priority of these needs. A sample survey was applied on widows who benefit from the services of the social units in the Cairo North Zone.

This is a descriptive study seeks to evaluate the needs of widows and determine the obstacles that hinder the fulfillment of these needs. It also seeks to identify the order of priority of these needs. A sample survey was applied on widows who benefit from the services of the social units in the Cairo North Zone. The sample included heads of the units and directors of the social affairs departments in Cairo North Zone. A questionnaire was applied with the widows and heads of the social units. A semi structured interview was conducted with directors of the social affairs departments. A random sample of 360 widows was drawn in addition to a sample of 45 heads of social units and seven directors of social affairs departments in Cairo North Zone. The study was undertaken in 45 administrative units.

Findings:

I. Priorities of needs among widows from their own perspectives:

- 1.Economic needs: Income related needs are among the main problems facing widows (88.21%), followed by work related needs (83.37%), then housing needs (81.85%).
- 2.Social needs: Self confidence- related needs (82.84%), followed by relations with others (79.93%), then social relations (64.98%).
- 3.Health needs: The need for medications ranked first (85.93%), followed by food needs (83.77%), then medical treatment (66.31%).
- 4.Educational needs: The need for educational services ranked first for widows (67.56%), followed by educational expertise (67.48%).
- 5.Psychological needs: Needs related to breaking widows' isolation ranked first (88.17%), followed by anxiety (78.84%), then fear (68.94%).
- 6.Economic, social, health, educational and psychological needs: Economics needs ranked first for widows (84.89%), followed by psychological needs (78.65%), health needs (75.77%), social needs (74.17%), then educational needs (67.51%).

II. Obstacles hindering the fulfillment of needs from the perspective of widows

- 1.Economic needs: The value of social security retirement pension does not increase despite the rise in prices. The reduction in income does not correspond to the increase in needs and lack of work opportunities.
- 2.Social needs: Services offered to widows do not include solutions to family problems, nor programs on how to raise children and deal with them
- 3.Educational needs: There is no time to learn how to read and write and no opportunity to go to literacy classes.
- 4.Psychological needs: Financial need affects the psychological state. There is no one that widows can go to in order to discuss their psychological problems and no specialized institutions to examine these problems.

III. Priorities of needs from the perspective of heads of social units:

Economic needs rank first (83.70%), followed by psychological needs (82.96%), then health needs (73.06%), social needs (70.02% and finally educational needs (67.51%).

IV. Obstacles facing the fulfillment of widows' needs from the perspective of heads of social units

1. Economic needs: The social security law does not respond to prevailing social conditions, the shortage of productive skills among widows and their need for training to establish their own projects.
2. Social needs: There is no concern with solving family problems, and widows are not offered the opportunities to participate in social activities.
3. Health needs: There is no health insurance for widows who are covered by social insurance; there are no health awareness programs and no programs on the food needs of widows.
4. Educational needs: Financial constraints do not enable widows to join literacy classes; there are no financial incentives to encourage women to avail themselves of educational opportunities.
5. Psychological needs: Widows face large responsibilities; they lack financial resources, and no attention is paid to their psychological problems.

Recommendations:**1. Economic needs:**

- Increase the amount of social security funds to allow widows to enjoy economic security
- Provide widows with work opportunities to help them establish small enterprises and train them to manage these projects.
- Design programs to guide widows to manage their family budget.

2. Social needs:

- Offer widows counseling services to help them manage their problems
- Develop a feeling of self confidence and self satisfaction among widows
- Provide widows with the means to raise their children and control family conflicts.
- The need for more social appreciation of the role played by widows through providing them with incentives
- Enhance widows' participation in social activities such as organized trips and cultural and art performances and enhance their participation in political parties.

3. Health needs:

- Extend health insurance to include widows; provide them with health care and free medications
- Provide widows with surgical services and respond to the needs of widows with special needs.
- Provide programs for health awareness and protection against diseases and proper food habits

4. Educational needs:

- Provide widows with literacy programs and enhance facilities to allow them to continue their education
- Raise widows' awareness about the government institutions and NGOs that can provide them with assistance.
- Design awareness raising programs about widows' legal rights.

5. Psychological needs:

- Provide specialists to solve widows' psychological problems
- Activate the role of family counseling to solve widows' psychological problems

About the Author

Mr. Khaled Fawzi Safieddin: Researcher, Research Center for Technological Development, Helwan University.

About the Program

The Egyptian Partnership in Development Research Program aims to inform development policies and strategies by linking those who conduct research with those who can utilize its findings to promote development in local communities. It promotes a research agenda which is responsive to the needs and priorities of local communities. The program is characterized by a multi-disciplinary, demand-driven, and participatory approach. The program began in Egypt in 1999. The program is directed by an Advisory Board of prominent members who are concerned with development issues.

About the Series

The PDR Policy Brief Series disseminates the results of research conducted under the auspices of the Partnership in Development Research Program funded by the Netherland Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Development Cooperation. It is currently operative in nine countries, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Egypt, Kerala-India, Mali, Nicaragua, Tanzania, Uganda and Vietnam. The authors are solely responsible for the content of the Policy Briefs. Copies of the Briefs can be ordered from the Secretariat of the Program or through the Program's web site.

Partnership in Development Research

American University in Cairo

Social Research Center

11th Floor ,Cairo Center

106Kasr Al-Aini Street

Cairo-Egypt

Tel: 00202-797-6959

Fax: 00202-795-7298

Email: pdr@aucegypt.edu

Website: www.aucegypt.edu/pdr

P
D
R