

# Socio-Economic Life and Survival Strategies of Impoverished Widows in West Muna Regency

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## Abstract

This study aims to describe and analyse (1) the socio-economic life of poor widows and the performance of family functions by poor widows in the Napano Kusambi District of the West Muna Regency, (2) the causes of poverty in widowed women, and (3) survival strategies for poor widows to escape the poverty trap. This type of research employs a qualitative, descriptive methodology. Implementing a qualitative description method enables researchers to provide a more thorough and in-depth explanation of the field's case descriptions. Three months of investigation were conducted in the Napano Kusambu District of the West Muna Regency between December 2022 and February 2023. The result of this study showed that (1) the phenomenon of socio-economic life of widows in Napano Kusambi District can be observed in their increasing household roles, increasing economic problems, and increasing responsibilities within the family, as well as their performing family functions in the form of economic functions, religious functions, cultural functions, the function of love, and the function of protection. (2) The causes of widows' poverty include limited land ownership and access to production, a lack of capital for businesses, and low levels of education and work skills. (3) The widow's survival strategies include an active strategy, a passive strategy, and a network strategy.

## Keywords

poor widows; socio-economic life; survival strategies, sociology

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## INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a complex and multidimensional issue that occurs not only in urban areas but also in numerous rural areas. Poverty has become a problem as ancient as humanity itself that humanity must contend with. Poverty has a variety of economic, social, and political definitions (Copeland and Daly, 2012; Husna, 2013; Zhang, Li and Han, 2019; Tisdell, 2020). Effective poverty alleviation necessitates collaboration across multiple disciplines, including economic, social, and political, in order to address root causes and construct more just and sustainable societies.

Poverty is inextricably linked to the family (Tisdell, 2020; Kadafi, 2021; Adhitya, Prabawa and Kencana, 2022). Families are obligated to satisfy the spiritual, psychological, clothing, food, and shelter requirements of their children (Sanders and Turner, 2018; Utami and Hanani, 2018). The purpose of establishing a family is to ensure the members' well-being. This is consistent with the concept of family, which is defined as a group of two or more people who reside together and have legal and emotional ties, and whose members have distinct roles (Friedman, 2010).

In family sociology, there is typically a distinction between families with a conjugal system that emphasizes the importance of blood ties, such as the relationship between a person and his parents (Fathien and Kismini, 2021), which tend to be considered more important than his ties with his husband or wife, and families with a conjugal system that emphasizes the importance of marital relations (between husband and wife), in which bonds with husband or wife tend to be considered more important than blood ties (Su'adah, 2005).

Sometimes, the marriage bond between husband and wife is fragile and dissolves, resulting in separation or even divorce. Divorce inevitably disrupts the function of the family, and both the divorcing spouse and the children must adjust to the new circumstances (Quah, 2016; Dowling and Barnes, 2020). The increase in the divorce rate

in society has also produced divorced family lifestyles, such as living alone as a widow or widower, having children who must live with only one parent, and perhaps even living apart from their own siblings.

The family is obligated to meet their children's requirements, which include religion, psychology, eating, drinking, etc. The purpose of establishing a family is to ensure the well-being of its members. Single parent women (widows) are a prevalent phenomenon in today's society. In this condition, according to Wahyuni (2016), a family loses a father or spouse for two reasons: divorce and death. A woman's decision to become the widow is a significant one. This decision carries a risk that a woman must bear for the remainder of her life. The widow must perform private responsibilities such as parenting and domestic management.

The phenomenon of the emergence widows and their growing connection to poverty is documented by the Central Bureau of Statistics (2013), which reports that the number of households headed by a woman and living in poverty accounts for 11.49 percent of the total number of singles.

The West Muna Regency is one of the regencies in Southeast Sulawesi Province with the highest poverty statistics. The increasing population of widows are also observed in the Napano Kusambi District of the West Muna Regency. This is based on preliminary research conducted at the research site by researchers. This is one of the reasons researchers want to conduct research in this area.

Based on the preceding description of the background and the paucity of studies at the research site, the aim of this research are to investigate the socio-economic lives of poor widows and their performance of family tasks in the Napano Kusambi District of the West Muna Regency; the causes of poverty in widowed women; and survival strategies for poor widows to escape the poverty trap.

A few researchers focused on defining the execution of social economic live doing single mother as a single parent in ensuring her family's survival (Rahayu, 2018). Beside,

(Pravita Yuliani and Tendriana, 2021) only providing solutions or suggesting policies to the government, community, and society to provide assistance to single parent families. Limited focus on specific Socio-economic experiences of widows may vary significantly across different cultural contexts. Research often tends to be limited to specific regions or communities, neglecting the diversity of experiences among widows from various cultural backgrounds. Exploring the socio-economic life of widows across different cultures could provide valuable insights into the specific challenges they face and the contextual factors influencing their socio-economic well-being.

Based on the information above, there are some key points that need to be researched for this study: (1) the socio-economic conditions of impoverished widows and their ability to fulfill family responsibilities in the Napano Kusambi District of the West Muna Regency, (2) the underlying factors contributing to poverty among widowed women, and (3) the techniques employed by impoverished widows to break free from the cycle of poverty.

## METHOD

This research is a qualitative research with a case study approach (Yin, 2013). This research was carried out for three months, from December 2022 - February 2023. The informants in this study were selected purposively, totaling 18 people, namely informants who were selected because of certain considerations. The details will be described as follows:

**Table 1.** Informants

No	Research Informants	Total	Code
1	Head of District	1	C
2	District Secretary	1	SC
3	Head of Village at Napano Kusambi District	6	KD01-06
4	Poor Widow at Napano Kusambi District	12	JM01-12

Data collection techniques in this study consisted of in-depth interviews, observation and document study. The research instruments were source triangulation, technical triangulation, member checking and reference adequacy.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### The phenomenon of poor widows' socio-economic lives and family functions

The results of the research in the form of interviews, field observations and documentation found several phenomena of socio-economic life and family functions that poor widows in the Napano Kusambi sub-district can still carry out which will be described as follows:

#### a. Phenomena of Social Life

The phenomenon of social life that is felt by poor widows in Napano Kusambi District is the increasing role of the household that must be lived and the increased responsibility in the family which will be described in the following table.

**Table 2.** Informants' Respond about the Phenomena of Social Life

Social Life	Result of Interview
Increased household responsibilities within the family	<b>JM-02:</b> It is undeniable that after the roles and responsibilities within the family divorce, I found it hard to bear everything alone. More or less, before the divorce, the burden was borne by the two of them, now it feels like it's being borne alone. It adds burden and responsibility to me.

#### b. The Phenomenon of Economic Life

The phenomenon of economic life that is felt by poor widows in Napano Kusambi District is the increasing perceived economic problems which will be described in the following table.

**Table 3.** Informants' Respond about the Phenomena of Economic Life

Economic Life	Result of Interview
Increased household roles and responsibilities within the family	<b>JM-01</b> It feels like our family life since I separated from my ex-husband. I feel that everything is heavy and that I have to bear the burden of my life and that of my children and their school. All items are going up in price and it's making it difficult for me. However, I am determined that I will and must work even harder to be able to live, eat and pay for my children's schooling. If I don't fight for my life and my children, where can I expect anyone else. When asked what was the difference between economic life before my divorce from my ex-husband, of course there was a big difference because I didn't feel as difficult as when I separated from my ex-husband.

**c. The Performance of Family Functions**

The description of family functions in this study refers to Law Number 10 of 1992 concerning Population Development and Development of a Prosperous Family which outlines several family functions that must be carried out which will be described in the following table.

**Table 3.** Informants' Respond about the Family Functions

Family Function	Result of Interview
Economy Function	<b>JM-06:</b> This is what you face when you decide to separate. The burden of making money that used to be more on the father of the children has shifted to me

Family Function	Result of Interview
Religion Function	<b>JM-05:</b> Parents still have to teach their children to get to know their religion, no matter how busy they are because they are making money or providing for their children. That's what I do every day at my house
Culture Function	<b>JM-011:</b> As a parent, their job is besides making money or a living for their children, it is also to instill values based on religion and culture. We, the Muna people, have a Katoba cultural ritual that we must introduce to our children as a demand for their life in the future
Love Function	<b>JM-03:</b> Their father who had left us all made us all realize to love him more. If not all of us in this house who do it, who will? I believe that my children know how much I love them with the abilities I have, and I believe that they also always act out there because they love me as their parents and will not do things that might be for me sad and annoyed because of their behavior
protection function	<b>JM-010:</b> In my opinion, it is not easy to carry out the duties and responsibilities of parents to always protect children from every problem. In the absence of their father by their side, the task of protecting them when there are problems is of course my full duty, and with the limitations that I have, I will do my best

**Factors causing poverty in poor widows in Napano Kusambi District, West Muna Regency**

Several causes of poverty among poor widows based on interviews with several informants and observations made by researchers will be described in the following table.

**Table 4.** Factors Causing Poverty in Poor Widows

Factors causing poverty	Result of Interview
Narrow land ownership and access to production	<p><b>JM-04:</b> I have land or land but the area is not that big so the results are also not enough to support me and my children</p> <p><b>JM-06:</b> I have a little land where I grow corn and vegetables. However, the income is not too much to be able to support the life of me and my children, so I have to work as a construction worker.</p> <p><b>JM-07:</b> I have little land or land even though the area is not large. I use it for gardening and raising chickens that sustain our family. Even so, I still feel that the results from gardening and raising chickens are sometimes still lacking when compared to our daily needs.</p>
Lack of capital for business	<p><b>JM-01:</b> Honestly, I don't have the capital to try other than what I'm doing right now.</p> <p><b>JM-03:</b> I don't have the capital to want to open a business other than what I'm currently doing, so I'm just resigned to a situation like this.</p> <p><b>JM-08:</b> I want to open a business, but I don't have enough capital to start a business.</p>
Low level of education and work skills	<p><b>JM-06:</b> In my opinion, because I come from a family that is on the poverty line. My school is also not high level (junior high school graduate), so those who can work to earn money don't have many choices. Apart from relying on the produce from the garden, I can only work as a laborer whose income is not great.</p> <p><b>JM-09:</b> Due to low skills and mediocre school graduation, there were not many options for work. Coupled with the fact that there are not many jobs in this village, it makes life even more difficult.</p> <p><b>JM-012:</b> In my opinion, maybe because Latawe Village does not provide many choices for its people to earn income. So if you survive in this village, there are not many work options. This has made many underprivileged people even poorer, including myself.</p>

**Strategies for survival of poor widows from poverty traps**

Widows who work in many types of jobs but whose income is not commensurate with meeting their daily needs must apply various ways and strategies to survive at all times. Some of the strategies that have been carried out by poor widows in Napano Kusambi District will be described in the following table.

The results of the study found that of the 12 poor widows who became research informants, there were 10 divorced poor widows and 2 poor divorced widows who died.

The findings of the study also succeeded in proving the existence of a socio-economic life phenomenon that often occurs in many women who are widows (widowed or divorced), namely:

1. The results of interviews with several widows spread across the Napano Kusambi District prove that all of these widows must play the role of not only being a mother but also a father to their children. They are not only required to have instincts as a mother but also to have the firmness and tough attitude like a father to their children. The



**Table 5.** Strategies for survival of poor widows

Strategies for survival	Result of Interview
Active Strategy	<b>JM-02:</b> There are many ways that I have to do in a difficult situation for me and my children. With 3 dependents and all of them going to school, it really forces me to work harder, not just relying on agricultural produce even though I have land that is not too large. I also tried other things by looking for sea shells which I brought to the Masara Village Market.
	<b>JM-08:</b> I rely on the results of my land which I plant several plantation products. Apart from that, I also raise chickens so that I can supplement my daily income
Passive Strategy	<b>JM-05:</b> Another way of surviving on a daily basis is maybe saving as much as I can in order to survive, spending money on really urgent needs
	<b>JM-09:</b> Another way to survive is not to force spending on necessities that are not too important or urgent because my daily income is erratic and sometimes I feel it is not enough to finance our lives
Connection Strategy	<b>JM-03:</b> Thank God, the village government entered my name as a recipient of Direct Cash Assistance (BLT). I think that assistance helped me when I was always in trouble to finance our lives.
	<b>JM-04:</b> The village government also pays attention to us receiving assistance in the form of BLT which we receive every 3 months, and that helps a little to ease my economic burden.
	<b>JM-011:</b> Thank God, the help from the government (BLT), which included my name, also helped me to survive so far. The help from the government felt able to reduce the economic burden that I felt was getting more and more burdensome for me.

findings of this study are in line with the result by Bescher-Donnelly & Smith (2019); Ernawati (2014); and Febrianto (2021) which state that one of the socio-economic phenomena that often occurs in women who are widows is the increased role that must be carried out in a family, especially those related to education and parenting children in the family circle.

2. Women with widow status face many additional economic problems, which before being widowed had never had such a heavy burden. These additional economic problems force women to work very hard to be able to overcome economic

problems that occur in the family, where widowed women are no longer additional people who cover the economic needs of the family but have acted as the backbone of the family's economy which will greatly determine the size of the family income. The findings of this study are in line with the concept put forward by Ernawati (2014) which states that one of the socio-economic phenomena that occurs a lot for women who are widows is the increasing economic problems that these widows have to face.

This research takes the concept of family function referring to Law Number

10 of 1992 concerning Population Development and Prosperous Family Development and the concept put forward by Harwalina (2019) namely economic function, religious function, cultural function, love function and function protection which will be described as follows.

#### Economy Function

Research findings have proven that poor widows in Napano Kusambi District as an incomplete family are able to continue to carry out their functions to meet the family's needs economically. Poor widows both those with the status of divorced dead and divorced, continue to carry out one of the family functions to earn income to meet the family's economic needs.

The findings of this study, namely that poor widows still carry out economic functions confirm that one of the functions that must be fulfilled by a family is the implementation of economic functions by the family (Harwalina, 2019).

#### Religion Function

The family as the smallest unit in a society's social life is expected to be able to become a means and place for fostering and instilling religious values or teachings as the basis and purpose of life for all family members. This is a research finding based on the results of interviews with all research informants (widows) who state that as parents, regardless of their status, they believe that the function of parents and family is the lowest institution to instill the basics of faith and piety to God Almighty for their children who will be a provision for life in the future for these children.

The findings of this study are in line with the roles and functions of the family which must carry out religious functions based on Law Number 10 of 1992 concerning Population Development and Development of Prosperous Families where several things form religious functions that must be carried out by the family, namely: the family is the main institution and First, to instill and disseminate teachings originating from religious teachings that are believed to all

family members, including children, as the basis for the religious beliefs of these family members and the family is expected to be able to provide real and concrete examples and can be used as role models in everyday life. day to practice the teachings of the religion that is believed.

#### Cultural Function

Research findings have succeeded in proving that poor widows in Napano Kusambi District as heads of families who are not intact are still able to carry out cultural functions that must be carried out as a family unit.

The research findings found that all research informants taught and instilled the *Katoba* culture to their children from an early age which was conveyed simultaneously with the instilling of the given Islamic religious teachings. It is hoped that planting and providing information on *Katoba* culture as one of the cultures and traditions handed down by the Muna people will be able to become their basis for living in the midst of society in the future.

#### Love Function

The research findings have succeeded in proving that poor widows in Napano Kusambi District as heads of families who are not intact are still able to carry out the function of love which must be carried out as a family unit. The widows stated that as parents, regardless of their status, they do everything for their children based on feelings of love and compassion. love them as parents.

The findings of this study are in line with the roles and functions of the family which must carry out the function of love based on Law Number 10 of 1992 concerning Population Development and Development of a Prosperous Family where several things form the function of love that must be carried out by the family, namely the family has a function to grow and develop the potential for affection between family members both through attitudes, behavior and words optimally and continuously at all times and the existing family is able to foster and encourage behavior and behavior of mutual love

between family members as the ideal pattern of a happy and loving family.

This research also found several causes of poverty that occurred in several villages in the Napano Kusambi District based on the results of interviews with several research informants and observations made by researchers which will be described as follows:

#### Narrow land ownership and access to production

The research findings, both from the results of interviews with several research informants, both poor widows, village government officials in the Napano Kusambi District and Napano Kusambi District government officials, found that the majority of widows who became informants in this study were living in poverty due to the lack of land ownership and access production, but there are also widows who have productive land but very narrow to serve as an optimal source of earning a living. The findings from this study confirm the concept put forward by Rasyid et al. (2022) that showed one of the causes of poverty in a person is due to the limited control and ownership of land or access to other productions owned by a person.

#### Lack of capital for business

Many of these widows do not have capital and do not have access and information to financial institutions that provide productive capital loans due to limited information and lack of conditions for making business capital loans. The findings of this research is in line with Husna (2013) and Indika & Marliza (2019) that showed one of the causes of poverty in a person is due to a lack of capital for business.

#### Low level of education and work skills

The results of the research study found that the majority had a low level of education, namely completing education only at the junior high school level. This has an impact on the low education and knowledge possessed to be used as capital in working and earning a living. The results of this study reinforce the theory put forward by Daryono (2017)

and Kornita *et al.* (2022) found one of the causes of poverty that occurs a lot in society is a low level of education which results in low business skills possessed.

This research was also successful in identifying and analyzing the survival methods and strategies adopted by widows in Napano Kusambi District in dealing with poverty and difficult circumstances which will be described in several strategies as follows:

#### a. Active strategy

The research findings concluded that all of these informants would optimize all their abilities to seek additional income apart from relying on their main job. This strategy is called an active strategy because the widows in this study are very active in not only relying on their main job but will look for all gaps and opportunities to work in other jobs that they can do and have opportunities to increase their income.

The findings of this study confirm the concept put forward by Karlita and Pandjaitan (2017) which states that one of the survival strategies carried out by the poor including widows is an active strategy, namely a strategy to use all potential to increase good income by extending working hours at work, main job or looking for other additional jobs that can generate money to finance the economic needs of the family.

The research findings are in the form of an active strategy that poor widows in Napano Kusambi District have to do to survive in line with the research findings conducted by Mira (2019) which concluded that one of the survival strategies carried out by widows in Lambara Harapan Village is an active strategy where the widows who were research informants apart from having a main job, all informants had additional/side jobs and made use of the informal sector which was considered capable of covering their limited education and skills.

#### b. Passive strategy

The research findings found that these widows would do a way of survival by reducing family expenses that were considered



not urgent so as not to exceed the income or income received. This method is felt to be carried out at any time along with a method or strategy in adding types of work (active strategy) that can generate income because the active strategy is felt to be insufficient to finance the economic needs of the family so that savings must be implemented at any time in order to maintain the continuity of the family's economic life. The findings of this study are also in line with the findings of research conducted by Subair et al. (2022) which stated that one of the strategies that will be carried out by widows of traders in the Sinjai Market in surviving is to suppress the cost of daily living necessities as a form of passive strategy to survive.

### c. Network strategy

The research findings in the form of interviews and observations with several widows, village government officials and sub-district governments found that government assistance programs that were distributed to vulnerable groups including poor widows were a strategy that poor widows had to implement in order to continue to survive in the midst of economic difficulties. that hit.

The findings of this study confirm the concept put forward by Karlita and Pandjaitan (2017) which states that one of the survival strategies carried out by the poor is a network strategy, namely a strategy for building networks and relationships both formally and informally with other people, the closest social environment and nearest government or private institution. The form of this network strategy is borrowing money from neighbors, borrowing from food stalls, taking advantage of the government's poverty eradication assistance program and or borrowing money from financial institutions such as banks or cooperatives. The research findings in the form of a network strategy produced by this study are in line with the results of research found by Subair et al. (2022) which stated that one of the strategies carried out by widow traders at the Sinjai Market was a network strategy in the form of participating and being active in the network of fellow traders in the form of

lottery or mutual mutual cooperation helps fellow traders, especially those who are in need of funds quickly. Meanwhile, it's different strategy from *Badu* tradition. *Badu* is a poor person's food sharing program. Orphans and widows are given a spot and are included in the celebration of the *badu* ritual (Dasion and Nugroho, 2020). Each region has its own culture. So it depends on how society responds to helping poor people, especially widows.

The research findings from the study on widows in the Napano Kusambi District present new perspectives and highlight the distinct challenges encountered by these individuals. The study uncovers a unique dual parental function that widows are obligated to fulfill, encompassing both their roles as mothers and their adoption of traditionally masculine attributes such as resoluteness and resilience. It highlights the heightened obligations that widows have in family affairs, notably in regards to schooling and child-rearing, in accordance with established socio-economic findings.

Moreover, the research illuminates the process by which widowed women assume the role of the primary financial support for their families, setting them apart from being simple supplementary contributions. An admirable component of the study is its comprehensive analysis of family activities, which includes economic, religious, cultural, and affectionate roles. The widowed moms play a significant role in cultural preservation by transmitting the *Katoba* culture to their offspring, so adding a cultural dimension. The research explores the complex relationship between economic and social difficulties, pinpointing specific factors that contribute to poverty, such as restricted land ownership and insufficient capital. In addition, the study delineates the survival tactics utilized by widows, classifying them into active, passive, and network strategies. The utilization of government aid programs is a vital aspect of widows' survival, underscoring the practical influence of external support networks on their ability to withstand economic hardships. The study's main contribution is its detailed examination of

the various roles, difficulties, and complex survival tactics of widows in the Napano Kusambi District.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the research and discussion that has been carried out, it can be concluded: first the phenomenon of the socio-economic life of poor widows in Napano Kusambi District, West Muna Regency can be seen from the increasing household roles that widows live, increasing economic problems and increasing responsibilities within the family; while several family functions such as economic functions, religious functions, cultural functions, functions of love and functions of protection have been carried out by poor widows. Second, the factors contributing to poverty among widows consist of narrow land ownership and access to production, lack of capital for businesses and low levels of education and work skills. Third, the survival strategy implemented by poor widows in Napano Kusambi District consists of: the active strategy shown by the widows' efforts to find additional jobs to increase their income. The passive strategy shown by widows is to make savings on expenses that are considered less urgent. The network strategy is in the form of participating in government assistance programs to eradicate and overcome poverty.

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