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WIDOW IN PUBLIC SPACE: REPRESENTATION AND SOCIAL REALITY

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**Abstract:**

*The existence of widowed women is still surrounded by stigma, particularly in their activities in public spaces. A negative impression persists in the minds of many towards widows; when they leave their homes for work or other activities, they are often perceived as seeking a new spouse. Conversely, if a widow stays home and does not work, she is seen as a weak woman. The aim of this research is to examine the societal stigma towards the existence of widows, their economic behaviors, and their outlook on the future. The research methods employed include observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis proceeds through stages of data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification. The research concludes that the five widowed women in Lasusua, North Kolaka Regency, serve as the units of analysis. In reality, each exhibits creative economic behaviors and holds a life vision that believes every problem has a solution. As single parents, they are capable of sustaining themselves and providing education for their children, with hopes for a better life in the future.*

**Abstrak:**

Keberadaan perempuan berstatus janda hingga kini masih terus diliputi stigma terutama pada aktivitasnya di ruang publik. Sebuah kesan buruk yang masih melekat dalam pikiran banyak orang terhadap seorang janda, yakni saat ia meninggalkan rumah untuk bekerja maupun aktivitas lain selalu dipersepsikan mencari calon suami baru. Di sisi lain jika seorang janda lebih banyak tinggal di rumah dan tidak bekerja, justru dianggap sebagai perempuan lemah. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah mengkaji tentang bentuk stigma masyarakat tentang eksistensi janda, perilaku ekonomi janda, serta visi hidupnya tentang masa depan. Metode penelitian yang digunakan: observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Analisis data dilakukan melalui tahapan reduksi data, display data, penarikan kesimpulan, dan verifikasi. Kesimpulan penelitian ini bahwa kelima perempuan berstatus janda di Lasusua Kabupaten Kolaka Utara sebagai unit analisis, dalam kenyataannya masing-masing memiliki perilaku ekonomi kreatif serta visi hidup yang meyakini semua masalah pasti ada solusinya. Dalam statusnya yang single parent mereka mampu bertahan hidup serta menyekolahkan anak-anaknya dengan harapan dapat meraih hidup yang lebih baik di masa mendatang.



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INTRODUCTION

Recent studies on public space have been carried out from aspects of history,

sociology, economics, culture, urban planning and spatial planning, as well as various approaches from other scientific



disciplines. The importance of public space and the characteristics of public space have at least been introduced earlier by Habermas (Ahmadin, Kurniawan, et al., 2023) as an important need for society regarding aspirations. Theoretically, Habermas introduced public space through the term 'Public Sphere' (Habermas, 2020) in the book "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Gougeois Society". This concept was built from a portrait of spatial reality created by a group of people from the bourgeoisie in 18th century Germany who yearned for freedom of opinion and freedom of opinion in expressing their aspirations. Habermas also perceives public space as a political representation that functions as an arena for political subjects to articulate their interests (Rosa, 2022).

As time goes by and changes in society move so quickly, public spaces emerge in various forms which are considered very important and require the human spirit in their atmosphere. In a book entitled "Whose public space? International case studies in urban design and development", about the importance of creating accessible public spaces as one of the characteristics of cities that serve the wider community (Madanipour, 2021). Furthermore, it also explains the important function of public space as a means of overcoming tensions and giving rise to urbanism that encourages social integration and tolerance (Kent, 2022). Apart from that, the most important thing in city development is not only the design of public spaces but also environmental responsibility (Carmona, 2021).

Public space, which is then interpreted as a place where people gather with the same goals, is also not limited to real space but also virtual space (Ahmadin,

Nugroho, et al., 2023). From the aspect of its function, public space today is imagined as a place capable of accommodating public interests. This paper presents public space as a stage for social activity where the actors are widows or women with single parent status who struggle against stigma in order to preserve the lives of both themselves and their children. The interesting thing about the phenomenon of the struggle of single parent women in conquering the hardships of life is their economic strategy and behavior as well as the patterns of space use they use. Apart from that, this article also explains the vision of life for widows which motivates them to work and try. Young widows and older widows have different ways of perceiving daily life, the future, and the practice of using public spaces for both income-earning and leisure activities.

In general, a widow is defined as a woman who is unmarried (does not have a husband) because she is divorced or left by her husband. Research on widows has been widely carried out and received serious attention from various circles, especially the frequent existence of widows who are considered weak, helpless and poor. In a research result that collected various data and facts about the narrative of the lives of widows in various countries, among other things, it was stated that their condition was worrying. The results of a study conducted by Cherie Blair, wife of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, showed that throughout the world there are at least 245 million women who are widows and more than 115 million of them live in poverty. In fact, in many cases it is said that widows often receive discriminatory treatment and violence. Research data shows that the largest number of widows in the world in 2010 was in China, which topped the



ranking with 43 million widows. The next largest in the world ranking is India with 42.4 million widows and the United States with 13.6 million widows. Indonesia ranks fifth with 9.4 million widows and is above Japan with 7.4 million widows, Russia with 7.1 million widows, Brazil with 5.6 million widows, Germany with 5.1 million widows, and Bangladesh and Vietnam respectively. as many as 4.7 million widows (Ridha, 2022).

From various research results, it is stated that the factors causing widowhood are not only the death of a husband, illness, divorce, abandonment by a man due to a woman's pregnancy, but are also caused by war and armed conflict. The difference with studies on other causes of widow status is that the focus of this paper's study is four widows or women with single parent status caused by the death of their husbands and their own desire to choose widow status. The factor of their own willingness to become widows is an interesting phenomenon related to the strength of the mind that makes them believe they can survive without a husband. Apart from that, the vision of life with widow status is also interesting to study in relation to the economic strategies carried out to fulfill daily living needs.

A dissertation that examines public space by referring to literary evidence and archaeological traces, trying to understand and define public space in Republican Rome. From the results of his study, it was stated that the definition of the concepts of 'public' and 'private' in Roman culture was fundamentally different from modern western discourse, so it was ambiguous and could be manipulated. However, studying public space with reference to its initial point of emergence, conceptually offers new insight into the characteristics of

Roman public space. In fact, in this dissertation it is stated that through additional insights from the theory of spatial syntax, a partial reconstruction of the diversity of spatial experiences in the city can be carried out. It was also stated that the lack of behavioral control is related to private space, but for the majority of residents who are not homeowners, it is public space that has greater freedom of access and behavior. In short, in this dissertation it is stated that public space is not a monolith, but offers a variety of spatial experiences and is experienced differently by each community in various places (Chen, Orum, & Paulsen, 2018).

In modern times, public space is interpreted as a place where people gather and have the same goal, namely relaxing. Even now space is not only limited to real space but also virtual space, where the function is the same, namely as a place capable of accommodating public interests. On the basis of this function, Kohn describes public space as not only related to social or aesthetic issues, but what is most important according to him is access to that public space (Duivenvoorden, Hartmann, Brinkhuijsen, & Hesselmanns, 2021). The important function of public space is as a means of overcoming tensions and giving rise to urbanism which encourages social integration and tolerance (Liu, Tan, & Chai, 2020).

Economic behavior is related to widows' survival strategies to meet their living needs and the needs of their children. In this study, it will be linked to the concept of happiness. A research result that uses experimental and non-experimental methods in the social sciences to reveal how happiness encourages the emergence of certain interesting behaviors is used as a conceptual framework for this study. In



relation to interpersonal behavior, happiness is produced by pro-social behavior. Even happiness is explained negatively by selfishness and positively by selfishness by trust. By presenting strong evidence, it is stated that this behavior is a cause of happiness rather than a consequence (Watkins, Frederick, & Dodson, 2022). Another study states that income growth and increased social security benefits have a significant influence on living arrangements in increasing independent living (Tarrant, 2022).

A study in Singapore illustrates how widows negotiate their way of life, so that they are no longer seen as mere recipients of apolitical gender roles. On the other hand, widows are considered as active institutions who plan their life strategies by carrying out their daily lives in various roles. Based on the results of this research, widows are very necessary in social and physical reproductive work regardless of their family. The importance of the role of widow slowly erases the traumatic experience of many people that widow status results in the loss of social identity and its meaning (Zinn, Lavric, Levine, & Koschate, 2022).

Based on the description of several studies on widows, it shows that many studies have been carried out on single parent women in various approaches and contexts. The study in this paper more specifically discusses the economic behavior of widows in an effort to survive and patterns of use of public space both related to economic and entertainment aspects.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This type of research is descriptive with qualitative data collection and analysis

(Jackson & Mazzei, 2022). The type of research data is in the form of a profile of each widow's life, survival strategies, forms of economic enterprise, and patterns of use of public space. Data collection techniques were carried out in the form of observations (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2017), especially covering the location and situation of public spaces that are often used by widows, free interviews and in-depth interviews to obtain data about the vision and life principles of widows as a source of motivation to work and try, how to construct space, and other. Then data collection techniques (Wallwey & Kajfez, 2023) through documentation or document study were also carried out with the aim of obtaining a number of documents containing data related to the history of the existence of public spaces as well as matters related to the activities of widows.

The subjects of this research were limited to five widows or women with single parent status using a deliberate selection technique based on predetermined criteria. Considering that there were only five informants, the data collection process was also carried out in the form of a Focus Group Discussion. The five widows each have various stories about the causes of becoming widows as well as their respective visions and life principles. Likewise, the economic behavior and space utilization patterns of each widow vary, making this study interesting. The data analysis technique is carried out in stages, data reduction, data display, and verification/drawing conclusions (Maxwell, 2021)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Widow Profile and Life Principles.*

Examining the causes of women's status as widows (Awaliah, Adenika, & Kaloeti,



2023) in social life (Luthin, Traverso, & Crawford, 2023) there are two main factors that cause widow status, namely: First, the cause of the desired action (fate factor), such as being left by her husband to die and being divorced. Second, a person has the status of a widow because of what she wants. The first motive for widow status (Ali, Hussaini, Ali, & Rogers, 2023) stems from disaster, namely the death of her husband, either due to illness or other causes. For this category of motive, the psychological burden (Imran, Aamer, Sharif, Bodla, & Naveed, 2020) is a little lighter, because the attitude of surrendering to fate by assuming that this is the will of the almighty God and humans cannot reject it, can relatively heal the hurt caused by losing one's husband. In conditions like this, the deceased husband remains in his status as her husband. On the other hand, the motive for being left behind for divorce carries a heavier psychological burden because she has lost her husband in terms of marital status only, while she can still see her ex-husband with another woman. In status conditions like this, conflicts and other undesirable things are very likely to occur. In fact, the saying often appears that a widow whose husband dies tends to take longer to find a replacement husband because she continuously remembers all her husband's goodness (Egsgaard, 2022). On the other hand, a widow who is divorced is usually quicker to get married again, the reason is because what is always remembered in their mind are the bad things that caused them to divorce.

The first subject of this research was a widow with the initials NP who had been in this status for approximately 10 years. According to his confession, he lives his life with the principle that all fortune, soul mate and death are completely determined

by God so that our task as humans is just to live it while trying. She became a widow because her husband died after suffering from illness for a long time. This widow with three children has almost no life problems related to economic needs, because she works as a civil servant, namely a teacher at a school in Lasusua. According to her, living life as a widowed woman is full of challenges, especially because there is often a social stigma (Odhiambo et al., 2023) from people around you that if you leave the house, especially at night, you are often seen as going to find a soul mate. Likewise, often when you meet a man, even if he is from your own family, it is often thought that you want to find a replacement husband. According to him, things like this are an obstacle to working in the public sector, especially for other friends who are also widows.

The second subject of this research was a widow with the initials RT who had only lived as a widow for three years. The reason she became a widow was because her husband died due to illness for several years. He tries to raise his three children from his own business with the principle that even small animals like ants can eat, let alone humans who have the sense to try and work (Ridha & Suhaeb, 2021). The third subject is a widow with the initials ST who lived as a widow for 12 years. He married at a relatively young age, because of an arranged marriage or his uncle's wishes. According to his confession, as an orphan he could only surrender when his family told him to marry and try to live a married life with a man he did not love. He only adapted to the nature, habits, desires and tastes of his husband after he married.

Approaching several years of their marriage and being blessed by God with



two children, boredom began to emerge because their daily life was only at home and taking care of the children. However, on the other hand, being young actually requires a relaxed atmosphere and frequent walks, especially for entertainment needs (Wirman, Sari, & Faisal, 2022). In conditions like this, she then chose to live alone without her husband and eventually became a widow. Then as a young woman, she almost didn't care about the future of her children and instead burdened her husband with caring for and nurturing them. Meanwhile, she herself chose to live as a widow and behave like a girl.

The fourth subject is a widow with the initials KS who lived as a widow for 5 years. She lived her life as a widow at a relatively young age because she had to divorce her husband. The factor causing the divorce was because the husband was still young and did not have a permanent job or no income, so KS's family did not approve of him. He resigned himself to fate and lived a simple life by trying to raise his only daughter with the principle that if God willed, his child would also be successful in the future like other children. With the support of his mother and father, he struggled to survive amidst the economic difficulties of his life.

**Economic Behavior.** The first subject lives as a widow and works as a teacher, relying on a monthly salary, she manages all the daily needs well for herself and her children. As for tuition fees, they are considered sufficient and specifically for other urgent needs, sometimes they use banking services for purchasing capital. The payment is made in monthly installments over a short period of time. From an economic perspective (Anderson & Bidner, 2023) he manages his life without thinking about purchasing assets in

the form of plots of land or gardens or other sources. Utilizing the capital he inherited from his family, namely empty land, he then built a house and used his monthly salary to pay for his children's schooling. As someone who understands that education is capital (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020) for a child's future, he believes that the act of sending children to school is also an economic strategy that can guarantee the future. Apart from that, he also believes that it is not becoming a civil servant that is the main goal for school but the most important thing is changing the way of thinking and the ability to take advantage of opportunities to earn income through business.

The second subject lives as a widow by continuing the business started by her parents. Even though the type of business in the form of a shop where he sells is not very large, according to him, it is enough to support his family's economic needs. Apart from that, the clove plantation inherited from his parents is also enough to support the economy even though the harvest is once a year. The strategy for managing the family economy (Mardievna & Oblokulovich, 2021) is by calculating the average monthly needs for himself and his children, then dividing it based on the amount of money from the harvest at the end of each year. The remaining money (Zelizer, 2021) is used as family savings for the future of their children. According to him, he also calculated other unexpected needs, for example the amount of money that had to be handed over to those holding wedding parties, celebrations for the birth of children, sick families, and others.

The third subject is a young widow who lives with two children, trying to survive without the burden of her two children. This means that her two biological



children were given to her ex-husband to look after them. He himself works as a shopkeeper at someone else's sales place with a weekly or monthly salary system. In carrying out this profession, he moved from one shop to another which was considered better and gave him a higher salary. According to him, the reason he moved from one shop to another was also because he sometimes worked as a daily laborer (Gudeta, Regassa, & Gamtessa, 2022) when the clove harvest period arrived, namely between August and October. Working as a daily laborer, namely picking cloves belonging to other people, according to him, can make a lot of money, namely around IDR 120,000 to IDR 150,000. After the harvest season, the shop where he worked no longer accepted him and he had to look for another shop. The important thing, according to her confession, is that working in the public sector as a widow is quite a difficult life struggle (Van Mechelen & Marchal, 2013). Never mind paying for children, just meeting your own needs is already difficult. Having already chosen the status of widow is a determination which according to him must be accompanied by hard work (Hardjadinata, Ginting, & Purnomo, 2022) to fulfill one's own needs, especially since she is an orphan.

The fourth subject is a young widow (Amoo et al., 2022) who lives with a child, initially only living dependent (Pushpakokilam & Suriyan, 2022) on her two children who work as seasonal farmers in the area. Living quietly at home without work for 3 years, made him bored with this condition. Apart from that, his only child also needs to be given money for his daily shopping (Atsız & Seyitoğlu, 2023). Finally, KS chose to work as a seller at a cellphone accessories shop with a mediocre salary. In his thoughts and principles, a

small salary is not a problem and the most important thing for him is being able to meet his children's daily needs (Gerona, 2021). He did not work as a salesman for long, because according to him he experienced quite a lot of temptations, especially since he was still young and had a pretty face. On the other hand, she still hopes that one day she can live with her husband. Finally, he decided not to work anymore and returned to his parents' house with nothing to do.

**Space Utilization Patterns.** Public space is an important need for many people for various common purposes. Thus, the function of public space (Chetty, 2023) can be said to be meaningful when it is able to meet the needs of its users. How to use space and its function varies greatly for each person as the giver of meaning so that the appearance of public space also varies. A girl certainly has her own pattern of using and interpreting a public space (Trawalter, Hoffman, & Palmer, 2021), likewise someone who is married has a way of using a public space and the meaning of its atmosphere. Even a widowed woman also has her own pattern of using public space (Browning, 2022) in accordance with the goals and meanings attached to it.

The first two widows, namely NP and RT, only made use of public space as much as possible based on the principle that when they were young, they used enough time to hang out with friends, whether in parks, beach piers, food stalls or at tourist attractions. On the other hand, the remnants of their strong loyalty to their husbands who have died have made these two widowed women consider that public spaces are no longer everything to create a sense of comfort after they are busy working. Both of them actually chose a hangout room with their social gathering (Szasz, Hajdu,



Szecs, Tipton, & Aczel, 2022) friends and considered it the best place that gave them a sense of comfort and entertainment. For a certain time, together with their social gathering friends, they also enjoy the beautiful views of the beach, parks and tourist attractions. Whether this action or way of utilizing the limited space of social gathering friends is a form of self-protection (Sedikides, 2021) against not getting another husband or other similar reasons, but what is certain is that public space is still a need for them even though the meaning and purpose of its use is different from other people's.

Two other widows, who are relatively young, have different methods and goals in using public space. Both admitted that they often use the park in the district capital as a place to visit, especially in the afternoon. Together with other visitors, the young widow enjoyed the beautiful scenery while taking photos and collecting them and then posting them on social media, such as Facebook and Instagram. Similar things are also done in other places, such as when hanging out enjoying the beautiful beach and waves in the afternoon while drinking avocado juice, orange juice or other types of drinks. Do they use public spaces as a place to relax (Polajnar Horvat & Ribeiro, 2023) and as a place to find a new partner? It turns out that both of them answered that it was not for such a purpose at all. In fact, according to both of them, every time they visit these public spaces, they are often harassed or teased by men. However, the young widow ignored him on the grounds that the man was not clear about his origins or type of work. In this case, they imagine public space not as a place to find or find a soul mate, instead it is just a place to relax after a tiring day's work. At the same time,

both attitudes are considered rational actions.

## CONCLUSION

The causes of becoming widows for the four women with single parent status who were used as the unit of analysis in this study were due to fate or something that was undesirable and the cause was because of something that was desired. The first cause is being widowed because her husband died and the second is because of the desired cause, namely becoming a widow because of her life choices. Compared to the first cause, the second cause of becoming a widow is an action that tends to be brave, such as having the principle of not being afraid of being a widow. The economic behavior of the four widows studied appears different even though in principle the goal is the same, namely struggling to survive by working. They continue to struggle between the social stigma that arises because of their status and trying to work to meet the living needs of themselves and their families. The way they use public spaces is different, namely the first two widows, namely those who are older, use public spaces only for family social gathering activities, while the other two widows who are still relatively old use public spaces more intensively, such as: city parks, hanging out on the beach, tourist attractions, various events, and others. According to the second category of widow, public spaces are a place to unwind after work as well as a place for entertainment for those who are still young.

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