

Widowhood and Intra-Household Resource Allocation in India

Abstract

We study the relationship between widowhood and women's access to consumption resources within Indian households. At first we document that spending on female assignable goods is lower in households with at least one widowed woman relative to households with no widows and that selection into widowhood is plausibly random. Thereafter we estimate a structural model based on the collective household framework to quantify how women's within household access to consumption varies by the presence of a widow. We find that women's share in household consumption is significantly lower in households where at least one widow is present relative to households that have only married women. Interestingly in the presence of a widow, women's access to consumption within the household is not found to improve with improvement in overall household socio-economic status. Individual level poverty computations based on model estimates reveal that when unequal within household sharing is taken into account, presence of a widow is associated with substantially higher female poverty but lower male poverty. Further, female poverty is found to be significantly higher than overall household poverty in the presence of a widow, whereas the opposite is found to hold for male poverty. Our results indicate the prominent role of marital status in influencing women's welfare within Indian households.