

**Refugee Review Tribunal  
AUSTRALIA**

**RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE**

**Research Response Number:** LKA31631  
**Country:** Sri Lanka  
**Date:** 24 May 2007

Keywords: Sri Lanka – The elderly – Widows

This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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**Questions**

**Could you please provide information about the treatment of the elderly in Sri Lanka? Is there any evidence at all that they are discriminated against or suffer adverse treatment as a social group?**

**RESPONSE**

**Could you please provide information about the treatment of the elderly in Sri Lanka? Is there any evidence at all that they are discriminated against or suffer adverse treatment as a social group?**

According to the available information, a number of government initiatives have been created to ensure the welfare of the elderly in Sri Lanka. However, limited information was found on the implementation of these measures. Resource constraints due to the continual conflict and the magnitude of the 2004 tsunami have hindered social welfare services. Sri Lanka's aged population is increasing, and the elderly have been identified as a "vulnerable group" in human rights assessments. The information suggests that the elderly, especially elderly women and widows, have suffered disproportionately mainly due to neglect and lack of needs identification.

Regarding discrimination generally, the latest US Department of State report on human rights in Sri Lanka states that: "The law provides for equal rights for all citizens, and the government generally respected these rights in practice; however, there were instances where gender and ethnic based discrimination occurred" (US Department of State 2007, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2006 – Sri Lanka*, March, Section 5 – Attachment 1).

The treatment of the elderly in Sri Lanka is not covered in the more commonly cited Government or NGO reports on human rights. Advocacy groups for the elderly (such as HelpAge International) have noted that, despite the fact that aged persons have been identified as a "vulnerable group" in Sri Lanka and other developing countries, little progress

has been made and older people's issues are still not being addressed. According to HelpAge Sri Lanka, "Some of the key problems faced by senior citizens in Sri Lanka are poverty, immobility, isolation, loneliness, dependency, ill health and lack of nutrition" ('HelpAge Sri Lanka homepage' (undated), HelpAge Sri Lanka website <http://www.helpagesl.org/> – Accessed 23 May 2007 – Attachment 2).

In April 2002 the United Nation's Second World Assembly on Ageing was held in Madrid. In preparation, a regional meeting of South Asian countries was held in India in August 2001. The report from this meeting includes the following information on the elderly in Sri Lanka:

**Mrs. N.J.Pathirana, Director, Department of Social Services, Sri Lanka** indicated that the traditional family support for the elderly is diminishing and more and more seniors are seeking accommodation in institutions. This is true even in cases of senior women, in spite of the fact that many elder women continue to take care of their grand children while their daughters migrate to neighbouring countries for economic reasons.

Sri Lanka established a National Committee on Ageing in 1982. It's objective is to take policy initiative in order to create healthy environment for older persons within the cultural mores and religious practices. The strategies employed are, to create awareness about population ageing, promote appropriate housing, transportation and living environment, provide access to continuous education and training, counselling services, social and economic protection, cater to the cultural and spiritual needs, conduct research and disseminate information, provide legal protection to the elders and ensure services for older persons in special circumstances.

The government has taken initiative in implementing certain programmes for the welfare of the elders. They are, creating awareness through media, pre-retirement training, home nursing, starting day care centres, conducting medical clinics and eye camps, providing intra ocular lenses, training of staff on issues of ageing and maintaining data bank.

Protection of the Rights of the Elders Act, 2000, ensures protection and welfare of older persons in Sri Lanka. This bill was passed unanimously, indicating the recognition of the importance of this topic for the State initiative. While ageing is one of the major issues of concern for most of the political parties, the government has incorporated several social security schemes, like pension, provident fund, gratuity, and public assistance to the destitute, TB, Leprosy and cancer patients.

**Ms. Annie V. Kurian, Deputy Co-ordinator, Women's Development Centre, Sri Lanka** gave the NGO a perspective on the status and situation of elders in Sri Lanka. The age of retirement is 55 for men but women can retire at the age of 50 and still be entitled to pension benefits.

In Sri Lanka there are three categories of elders who need to be considered. The categories being urban, rural and the war affected elder people. There are other categorisations that need special considerations, such as, Sinhalese, Tamils and people of Indian origin. Since majority of the people live in the rural areas and need to commute to the urban sectors, transportation is a major concern. Poverty, changes in the family structure, fewer medical services as well as gap in the inter-generational understandings makes the situation of elders more precarious.

Media has not played any positive pro-active role in this field, nor are there many NGOs active in this area. The reason being lack of information as well as interest about elders and population ageing ('Report of the SAARC Consultation on Ageing' 2001, UN Programme on

Ageing website, 17-19 August <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/ageing/waa/saarcrep1.htm> – Accessed 23 May 2007 – Attachment 3).

The statement made at the April 2002 Second World Assembly on Ageing by the head of the Sri Lankan delegation, H. E. Mr. Chandra Wickramasinghe, details the social and economic problems facing Sri Lanka as a result of the ageing population and the changing demographics of the country. According to Mr. Wickramasinghe, the proportion of elderly people is increasing exponentially and women will constitute the majority as their life expectancy is higher than for men (currently 75 years for women, 70 years for men). Mr. Wickramasinghe also noted that the historical, religious and cultural background of Sri Lanka meant that older people were traditionally cared for at home by family members. Elders in villages still mainly lived within this traditional extended family setting, whereas:

...in urban families most of the elderly people have to live alone and face loneliness and other accompanying problems stemming from insufficient family incomes coupled with a high cost of living (United Nations 2002, 'Sri Lanka: Statement by H.E. Mr. Chandra Wickramasinghe', *Address by the Head of Delegation at the Second World Assembly on Ageing*, UN Second World Assembly on Ageing website, 11 April <http://www.un.org/ageing/coverage/srilankaE.htm> – Accessed 23 May 2007 – Attachment 4).

Despite Sri Lanka's resource constraints as a developing country, the information presented indicates that Sri Lanka has introduced a number of measures to assist in providing for the ageing population. Mr. Wickramasinghe outlined some of the steps taken in Sri Lanka to ensure the welfare of the elderly, including: National Committee on Ageing; National Policy on Ageing; NGO Participation; Legislation for the Elderly; Identity Cards for Elderly People; Income Security; Day Care Centres and Home Nursing Service. These measures are detailed in his Address to the Assembly, which is included as an attachment. The "strong religious and social mores which cast compelling moral obligations on the younger generations to treat the elderly with due care, respect and dignity" were also pointed out during the Address (United Nations 2002, 'Sri Lanka: Statement by H.E. Mr. Chandra Wickramasinghe', *Address by the Head of Delegation at the Second World Assembly on Ageing*, UN Second World Assembly on Ageing website, 11 April <http://www.un.org/ageing/coverage/srilankaE.htm> – Accessed 23 May 2007 – Attachment 4).

It should be noted that, while measures have been put in place to provide services for the elderly, Sri Lanka's continual conflict footing has meant that these measures are often not properly implemented because of resource constraints, as social sector expenditure has continued to fall due to the increasing financial costs of the war. A 2005 response to information request by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada provides relevant information on the situation of the elderly in Sri Lanka, including available social services (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2005, *LKA100504.E – Sri Lanka: The situation of the elderly, including elderly Tamils and those who have been displaced; the social services available to the elderly*, 13 December – Attachment 5).

### **Protection of the Rights of the Elders Act**

The Protection of the Rights of the Elders Act No. 9 of 2000 was certified on 4 May 2000, and implementation commenced two years later. According to an article by Dharmapala Senaratne, "'an elder' for the purposes of this Act has been defined to be 'any person who has passed the age of sixty years'" (Senaratne, D. 2006, 'Welfare of elders Our duty to look after parents', *The Nation On Sunday*, 13 August <http://www.nation.lk/2006/08/13/events.htm> – Accessed 23 May 2007 – Attachment 6).

A 2003 report by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) states:

In Sri Lanka with the elderly population on the rise, Ms. Yamuna Chitranganie highlighted about the protection of rights of elders act. Ms Yamuna Chitranganie added that the government in Sri Lanka had introduced, innovative programmes like the farmer's and fishermen's social security benefit act and social security for low income earning self-employed persons and those employed on an informal basis. She elaborated on the micro-credit schemes existing in Sri Lanka and other social security enactments that extended social protection to the workers in the informal sector... The government is presently having discussions with the ILO to extend the coverage of social security to the excluded and the poor, with the help of ILO. Ms Chitranganie concluded by saying that though Sri Lanka has developed a number of social protection schemes, many people continue to be left out. It was identified that existing schemes need better implementation (UNESCAP 2003, 'Report of the Workshop on Social Protection for Women in the Informal Sector, 8-10 September 2003', September, p. 29 <http://www.unescap.org/esid/GAD/Events/SocialProtectionSep2003/Report.pdf> – Accessed 23 May 2007 – Attachment 7).

An undated Progress Report for 2006, included on the Sri Lankan Ministry of Social Services & Social Welfare website, lists some of the welfare measures for Senior Citizens which are in the process of being implemented. The following is taken from this Progress Report:

7. P.-17 Respected Senior Citizens programme

I will not allow senior citizens who have devoted their lives for the children and the country, to be lonely.

Action: National Policy on Older persons Elders Charter is ready for submission to the Cabinet.

10 Mn has been allocated for refurbishing elder's homes in collaboration with Provincial Councils.

8. A deduction of 50% of the fares as levied by public sector transport operators will be offered to senior citizens who are above 70 years of age.

A free railway warrant will be issued once a year to senior citizens to go on a pilgrimage.

Action : Action is being taken to have discussion with Minister of Transport.

Relevant data and other information are being collected to prepare a proposal for additional allocation.

9. Homes for the Aged for the benefit of destitute senior citizens with the assistance of NGOs and private sector.

Action ; – New proposal to establish 25 homes in all 25 districts are almost ready for implementation

('Progress Report on Mahinda Chintana' (undated), Sri Lanka Ministry of Social Services and Social Welfare website [http://www.socialwelfare.gov.lk/edit\\_news\\_events.php?id=16](http://www.socialwelfare.gov.lk/edit_news_events.php?id=16) – Accessed 23 May 2007 – Attachment 8).

The US Social Security Administration, Office of Policy website includes information for 2006-2007 on international social security programs, including old age programs. The section on Sri Lanka is included as an attachment (US Social Security Administration 2007, 'Sri Lanka', *Social Security Programs Throughout the World: Asia and the Pacific, 2006-2007*, US Social Security Administration, Office of Policy website, March

<http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/progdesc/ssptw/2006-2007/asia/srilanka.pdf> – Accessed 23 May 2007 – Attachment 9).

## 2004 Tsunami

Information gathered after the tsunami suggests that the elderly in Sri Lanka remain an especially vulnerable group.

In 2005 HelpAge International published a research paper on the impact of the disaster on older people in tsunami-affected countries, including Sri Lanka. The report includes the following on the situation of older people in South Asia before the tsunami:

In Asia, the older population is expected to increase at a faster rate in the next 50 years, with the share of population over 60 years of age more than doubling from 9.4 per cent of the total population in 2000 to an estimated 23.5 per cent by 2050. By 2050, Asia and the Pacific will be home to 1.2 billion people aged over 60 years and this will account for 63 per cent of the world total.

...A recent UNESCAP study shows that where older populations are growing fastest, they are consistently and disproportionately among the poorest of the poor. **The continuing gender gap in life expectancy in the region means that many older people living in poverty are women** [researcher emphasis added] (HelpAge International 2005, *The impact of the Indian Ocean tsunami on older people*, June, Global Action on Aging website <http://www.globalaging.org/elderrights/world/2005/emerg.pdf> – Accessed 22 May 2007 – Attachment 10).

Matara was one of the two administrative areas in Sri Lanka which were identified by researchers as badly affected by the tsunami. The report states:

Older people, often neglected in normal circumstances are even more vulnerable in disasters. Despite international protocols such as the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Sphere guidelines the research confirms that in the tsunami they were not specifically targeted and in some cases, the relief effort discriminated against them. In many cases older men and women were unable to access health care, food and cash support due to discrimination, lack of information or support mechanisms (HelpAge International 2005, *The impact of the Indian Ocean tsunami on older people*, June, Global Action on Aging website <http://www.globalaging.org/elderrights/world/2005/emerg.pdf> – Accessed 22 May 2007 – Attachment 10).

The report also cites a World Bank assessment on Sri Lanka after the tsunami, which states:

Orphans, widows, singleheaded households, old and disabled are especially vulnerable groups in terms of psychosocial distress, restoration of livelihood, and the legal and protection rights – on such issues as property and inheritance rights, and custody of children. This will need to be addressed (HelpAge International 2005, *The impact of the Indian Ocean tsunami on older people*, June, Global Action on Aging website <http://www.globalaging.org/elderrights/world/2005/emerg.pdf> – Accessed 22 May 2007 – Attachment 10).

In October 2005 a national workshop was held in Colombo on the impact of the tsunami on “vulnerable groups” and women in Sri Lanka. The subsequent report notes the findings that more women than men had suffered the adverse impact of the disaster, and the elderly were particularly vulnerable. It was also noted that “there was uneven delivery of services” which affected “vulnerable groups” the most, and that “[o]lder persons often felt that nobody had shown concern for them.” The report states:

Women suffered disproportionately, particularly the elderly, and were more vulnerable in terms of livelihood opportunities, abuse and having more responsibilities (UNESCAP 2005, *Report on the National Workshop on the Impact of the Tsunami on “Vulnerable Groups” and Women*, 20-21 October, p. 11. Cited on Global Action on Aging website <http://www.globalaging.org/armedconflict/countryreports/asiapacific/tsunamiwork.pdf> – Accessed 23 May 2007 – Attachment 11).

The report further notes that:

the tsunami had brought about changes in traditional family structures and networks, contributing to single parent families and leading to difficulties for children to look after elderly parents as previously many siblings shared such responsibilities. Furthermore many traditional social networks had broken down, with increasing social divisions in society, as well as anger, jealousies and frustrations among people created by unequal and unfair treatment (UNESCAP 2005, *Report on the National Workshop on the Impact of the Tsunami on “Vulnerable Groups” and Women*, 20-21 October, p. 13. Cited on Global Action on Aging website <http://www.globalaging.org/armedconflict/countryreports/asiapacific/tsunamiwork.pdf> – Accessed 23 May 2007 – Attachment 11).

According to a 2006 human rights assessment report on the tsunami response efforts, elderly women remained among the most neglected. This report focuses on human rights in the countries hit by the 2004 tsunami. It focuses on the accountability of governments and their role in responding to tsunamis. It also examines how new legislations, policies and practices are undermining people’s right to food, water and homes. Among vulnerable groups, older persons are often at risk. The report also shows that among vulnerable people, older women are the poorest of all and remain the most neglected. The report states:

In responding to the tsunami, governments have, once again, largely neglected the particular needs of women. Women have not been included in decision making regarding damage assessment, allocation of plots, land surveys or design of shelters and permanent houses. Orphaned girls, single women, women heading their households and women who are elderly, disabled or part of minority and vulnerable communities remain the most neglected.

Single women, including widows, have not been recognised as a household unit and have frequently been denied compensation (ActionAid International, People’s Movement for Human Rights Learning (PDHRE), & Habitat International Coalition – Housing and Land Rights Network (HIC-HLRN) 2006, *Tsunami Response – A Human Rights Assessment*, January. Cited on Global Action on Aging website [http://www.globalaging.org/armedconflict/countryreports/asiapacific/tsunami\\_HR.pdf](http://www.globalaging.org/armedconflict/countryreports/asiapacific/tsunami_HR.pdf) – Accessed 23 May 2007 – Attachment 12).

### **Charities for the elderly**

Head of HelpAge Sri Lanka’s Project Division, Ms Jinadaree Gunawardena, spoke at the 2005 workshop about the challenges that older persons faced in recovery following the tsunami. According to Ms Gunawardena:

[T]he loss of breadwinner children led to many older persons living in misery. Furthermore sometimes older persons had to look after the children of their children (as the latter died). Older persons were generally not spoken to in a manner conducive to effective counseling and so were often living with much sadness. Medical care for older persons, such as eyecare, tended to be poor, but Helpage was providing for the needs of many older persons. Many associations of older persons had been formed and there were plans to form more in order to help address issues that affected them (UNESCAP 2005, *Report on the National Workshop*

*on the Impact of the Tsunami on “Vulnerable Groups” and Women*, 20-21 October, pp. 14-15. Cited on Global Action on Aging website <http://www.globalaging.org/armedconflict/countryreports/asiapacific/tsunamiwork.pdf> – Accessed 23 May 2007 – Attachment 11).

HelpAge Sri Lanka is a non-Government organisation which provides services for vulnerable senior citizens in Sri Lanka. The HelpAge Sri Lanka website (<http://www.helpagesl.org/>) has information on services provided, such as health care, youth education programs, training programs, day care centres, and tsunami recovery programs (‘HelpAge Sri Lanka – Annual Review 2005-2006’ (undated), HelpAge Sri Lanka website <http://www.helpagesl.org/images/publication.pdf> – Accessed 23 May 2007 – Attachment 13).

The Jayawickreme Foundation is another aged-focused charity which undertakes poverty alleviation projects and tsunami reconstruction work in the Matara district. According to the Foundation, the needs of the elderly are often overlooked in Sri Lanka. A March 2007 newsletter on the Global Action on Aging website states:

The Jayawickreme Foundation has opened a day care centre for 40 old people, who are either traumatized, neglected or lonely, in the coastal town of Weligama [in Matara district] in southern Sri Lanka since October 2006. This part of Weligama was badly hit by the Tsunami. The centre is free of charge. The centre is open for all religions and communities.

In general old people – with the exception of civil servants – do not get pension in Sri Lanka. They therefore depend completely on support from their families (‘Jayawickreme Foundation – Day Care Centre for the Old People’ 2007, Global Action on Aging website, March <http://www.globalaging.org/elderrights/world/2007/2-Jayawickreme%20Foundation%202.htm> – Accessed 23 May 2007 – Attachment 14; see also Jayawickreme Foundation website: <http://www.jayawickreme.org/>).

## **Women**

The latest US Department of State report on human rights in Sri Lanka includes the following information on discrimination of women:

Women have equal rights under national, civil, and criminal law; however, questions related to family law, including divorce, child custody, and inheritance, were adjudicated by the customary law of each ethnic or religious group... Women were denied equal rights to land in government-assisted settlements, as the law does not institutionalize the rights of female heirs. Different religious and ethnic practices often resulted in uneven treatment of women, including discrimination (US Department of State 2007, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2006 – Sri Lanka*, March, Section 5 – Attachment 1).

A 1999 Asian Development Bank (ADB) briefing paper on women in Sri Lanka notes that the increasing number of aging women will require specific attention. The paper states:

In Sri Lanka poor women, especially those who are household heads or old, face enormous hardships and must fight to ensure their family’s economic survival. Macro data and micro studies indicate that their quality of life and employment conditions have deteriorated during the last two decades as a result of, among other factors, increased living costs, which pushed women into lowskilled, low-paid jobs. Indeed in the NPAW, the Government acknowledged that “Women have faced continuing unequal access to economic policies followed by the governments over the last two decades with an increase in the number of women in poverty with little state support for them to withstand the adverse impact of such development policies” (NPAW, page 59, 1995).

Two new vulnerable groups have emerged in recent years. A recent study found that due to changes in the demographic structure and the increasing aging population and rising female life expectancy (which is higher than male life expectancy at 74 years for female compared to 70 years for male), a higher proportion of widows and elderly poor women have become more impoverished. As a result, over half the inmates in the Elders' Home in the study were women, and majority of these women were there because there was no one to look after them at home. It was also found that the human and material resources of low-income families were insufficient to care adequately for aging women. Likewise, geriatric care and homes for the aged are totally inadequate to meet the needs of low-income families (Asian Development Bank 1999, *Country Briefing Paper: Women in Sri Lanka*, May – Attachment 15).

The ADB paper also states that:

In the transition years following colonial rule, Sri Lankan policymakers introduced a social policy package of free health and education services and subsidized food, which dramatically improved women's quality of life. Compared to the rest of South Asia, Sri Lankan women are very well off, enjoying high life expectancy (74 years), nearly universal literacy, and access to economic opportunities, which are nearly unmatched in the rest of the subcontinent.

However,

Since 1981 the south has been engaged in a protracted ethnic conflict in the north and east, which has resulted in substantial social dislocation and trauma. In addition, social sector expenditure, which had been reduced in the mid-1980s as a result of the implementation of the structural adjustment programs, was further cut back by the increasing financial cost of the war in the late 1980s and in the 1990s. As a result there has been a perceptible deterioration in the quality of health and education services and therefore in the quality of life of women and their families (Asian Development Bank 1999, *Country Briefing Paper: Women in Sri Lanka*, May – Attachment 15).

### **Widows**

According to a number of sources, widows in Sri Lanka suffer from marginalisation and/or discrimination and are regarded as inauspicious or "bad luck" in a community (Johnston, N. 2003, *UNSC Resolution 1325 – South Asian Women's Perspectives*, International Alert website, June, p. 19 <http://www.international-alert.org/women/publications/AsianPaper.pdf> – Accessed 22 May 2007 – Attachment 16).

A 2005 paper published by UNIFEM states that:

...violence and discrimination against widows is a common cultural practice in South Asia...The lack of economic independence and security for a widow makes her particularly vulnerable. Supposed to be inauspicious, she is socially secluded and discriminated against (UNIFEM 2005, 'Accountability to the World's Women', *Key Gender Issues in South Asia: A Resource Package*, May, pp. 9-10 <http://www.unifem.org.in/PDF/Key Gender.pdf> – Accessed 22 May 2007 – Attachment 17).

In 2001 the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) published a paper on widows in developing countries. According to DAW:

It can be said that there is no group more affected by the sin of omission than widows. They are painfully absent from the statistics of many developing countries, and they are rarely mentioned in the multitude of reports on women's poverty, development, health or human rights published in the last twenty-five years. Growing evidence of their vulnerability, both

socio-economic and psychological...now challenges many conventional views and assumptions about this “invisible” group of women.

... Neglected by social policy researchers, international human rights activists and the women’s movement, and consequently by Governments and the international community, the legal, social, cultural and economic status of the world’s widows now requires urgent attention at all levels of society, given the extent and severity of the discrimination they experience. This urgency is increased by the fact that, in all countries, North and South, widows far outnumber widowers, due to longer life expectancy and the frequent age disparity between partners . Therefore, the ageing trend of the population globally implies that the majority of the elderly in all countries will be made up of females, many of them widows requiring support (UN Division for the Advancement of Women 2001, ‘Widowhood: invisible women, secluded or excluded’, *Women2000*, December, pp. 2-3 [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/wom\\_Dec%2001%20single%20pg.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/wom_Dec%2001%20single%20pg.pdf) – Accessed 22 May 2007 – Attachment 18).

The DAW paper also states that, in Sri Lanka, “war widows from both sides of the conflict experience poverty and marginalization” (UN Division for the Advancement of Women 2001, ‘Widowhood: invisible women, secluded or excluded’, *Women2000*, December, p. 7 [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/wom\\_Dec%2001%20single%20pg.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/wom_Dec%2001%20single%20pg.pdf) – Accessed 22 May 2007 – Attachment 18).

In February 2002 a South Asian Conference, “Capacity Building of Marginalized Women: Widows”, was organised. The subsequent report includes testimonies from South Asian widows. The testimonies from two Sri Lankan widows are included below:

Wickrama Dulin Nona De Silva made the presentation for Sri Lanka, “I am a widow but I have never been starved, or ever discriminated against.”

Sri Lanka has a population of 19 million people. It is a multi-religious society that recently has been through political unrest. 53% of the population of Sri Lanka is made up of women; there is an overall literacy rate of 88%. Average life expectancy is 75 years.

In our country there has been death and destruction of thousands of women due to the highly unstable political scenario since the past many years. In Batticaloa alone there are 1000 widows; 400,000 women live in shelters across the country.

On one hand the status of women is high, but if you look at the decision making powers, Sri Lankan women have none. There is differentiation in property rights. As in other countries of South Asia a widow is considered inauspicious, not part of any social functions and seeing a widow’s face in the morning is assumed to bring bad luck. Other male members consider a woman without a man, unprotected and subject her to unnecessary harassment. Remarriage in some communities is accepted; a man can enter a relationship with a widow.

Pension schemes for widows are in place provided the widow has a legal marriage certificate. However, this scheme is often misused. If the woman is the widow of a person who has been in the armed forces, she receives a comfortable pension. The deceased husband’s family never encourages the widow to marry, as they want to hold on her pension (Widows International 2002, ‘Conference Report II’, *South Asian Conference Capacity Building of Marginalized Women: Widow, Grief & Renewal* website, February <http://griefandrenewal.com/report4.htm> – Accessed 23 May 2007 – Attachment 19).

And:

My husband used to work for an audit office. He died while at work about 4 and years ago -- he had a heart attack. Ours was a marriage filled with love. It was an inter-caste wedding. Once widowed there were many situations I had to face. When my son married I was not able to attend the ceremony, was not allowed to touch the wedding sari. I did not attend functions. I did nothing that came under the category of pleasure. My children went abroad, one to Baharain and the other to Muscat. I was never so alone in my life.

To avoid the loneliness, 7 of us widows joined together to make an association. We travel together; we see movies together and go to restaurants together . . . we have begun to live again. There are 280 members in our association. . . . the membership fee is Rs 10. At this stage our current problem is finances . . . where do we get the money to run the association? (Widows International 2002, 'Conference Report IV: Voices of Grit', *South Asian Conference Capacity Building of Marginalized Women: Widow, Grief & Renewal* website, February <http://griefandrenewal.com/report6.htm> – Accessed 23 May 2007 – Attachment 20).

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ISYS (RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue

## List of Attachments

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