

DECLINE IN MORTALITY AND CHANGE IN AGE AT MARRIAGE AS FACTORS AFFECTING INCIDENCE OF WIDOWHOOD

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THE incidence of widowhood observed in a population is mainly the outcome of the level of mortality experienced and the marrying habits prevailing in the population. Decline in mortality and increase in age at marriage are two of the factors which lead to a decline in the incidence of widowhood.¹ These two factors are examined in this paper on a comparative basis.

Rate of incidence of widowhood at a particular age is defined in this article as the probability of a married woman becoming a widow at that age. By definition these rates are based on the mortality level at different ages and they are applicable to married women only. The rates are, therefore, independent of age at marriage in the sense that they have been applied whatever may be the age at marriage prevailing in the population. An attempt is being made in this paper, to calculate age-specific rates of incidence of widowhood at different mortality levels and then to compare the incidence of widowhood (expressed in the form of 'proportion of widows to ever-married women') for different ages at marriage under certain assumptions.

In order to obtain the age-specific mortality pattern at different mortality levels, the life-tables for India for the years 1951, 1961 and 1971 as given by Coale and Hoover² have been utilized. The estimated expectations of life at birth (i.e. values of e^0) for males and females in these years are as follows :

Expectation of life at birth

	Males (years)	Females (years)
1951	33.5	34.9
1961	44.2	45.7
1971	49.3	51.0

¹ It has been observed that the general decline in death rate has resulted in the decline in the proportion of widows in a population. (See : 'The decline in death rate and its effect on the extent of widowhood', by A. R. Kamat. Sociological Bulletin, March 1963.)

² Coale, A. J. and Hoover, E. M., *Population Growth and Economic Development in Low Income Countries*, Princeton, Office of Population Research (1958).