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Editorial Note:

This latest issue of the Journal of Contemporary Society Education (JCSE) arrives at a moment when the boundaries between the academic, the social, and the urgently practical have never been more porous. A glance at the twenty-one articles in this forthcoming collection reveals a publication that understands its mandate: to serve not merely as a repository of scholarship, but as a sharp, coherent lens through which to examine the pressing complexities of contemporary society, with a firm grounding in education as a transformative force.

What distinguishes this issue is its refusal to settle for disciplinary comfort. The contributions, drawn from institutions across Africa, demonstrate a welcome intellectual restlessness. We see scholars interrogating the intimate, such as Mudau et al.'s exploration of language as a source of family conflict within Vhavenda families alongside those grappling with structural questions, such as Sikwela and Diedericks' critical look at performance management as "a mirror of inertia" in public administration. This range is not a sign of incoherence; it is a testament to the journal's understanding that societal education occurs in classrooms, in homes, in municipal water governance (as Zulu and Nojiyeza's work on Zululand shows), and in the very language we use to communicate.

Several pieces stand out for their conceptual bravery. Maungedzo's reframing of academic literacy through sociocultural theory for rural teacher development tackles a perennial challenge with fresh theoretical rigour. Similarly, Lubombo and Zethi's work on "linguistic justice" and the Disciplinary Literacies framework asks a question that South African higher education can no longer afford to postpone: how do we re-imagine instructional communication not as a barrier, but as an equitable foundation? These are not abstract debates; they are core pedagogical interventions.

The journal also demonstrates a commendable commitment to surfacing marginalised voices and experiences. Nkumane's exploration of intersectionality and the lived experiences of Black women scholars at UNISA, and Sibango's ethnographic look at how belonging is negotiated in Anthropology departments, remind us that the university itself is a site of intense social contestation. When Lekoa and Nojiyeza connect off-campus housing to "ecologies of distress" affecting student mental health, they do what good contemporary scholarship must: they trace the material conditions of life directly into the outcomes of education.

If there is a through-line to this collection, it is the insistence that no social phenomenon, whether climate governance under the AU (Yemisi and Ani), the antinomies of decolonisation in literature (Moopi), or the gendered nexus of marital status and poverty (Dunga), exists outside the purview of rigorous inquiry. The JCSE is building a platform where scholars can hold those complex phenomena up to the light.

This volume does not offer easy answers. It offers something more valuable: a coherent, sharply focused set of questions, pursued with methodological care and regional relevance. For a journal of contemporary society and education, that is precisely the work that matters.

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A GENDERED ANALYSIS OF THE NEXUS OF MARITAL STATUS AND POVERTY

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Abstract

This study examines the gendered relationship between marital status and poverty in South Africa using nationally representative microdata from the 2023 General Household Survey (GHS). Drawing on feminist economics, intra-household bargaining theory and the capability approach, the analysis investigates how different marital categories, marriage, cohabitation, singlehood, divorce, separation and widowhood, shape individuals' likelihood of experiencing poverty, and whether these effects differ between men and women. Descriptive statistics reveal substantial disparities across gender and marital groups, with women and unmarried individuals disproportionately concentrated among the poor. Logistic regression models show that, relative to legally married individuals, those who are single, divorced, widowed or cohabiting face significantly higher odds of poverty, even after controlling for race, education, employment, household size and age. Gender remains a strong predictor of poverty, although its effect diminishes once structural factors are accounted for, suggesting that labour market inequalities mediate much of the gender gap. Marginal effects confirm that non-married groups experience a significantly higher probability of being poor. These findings highlight the continued economic importance of marriage in providing financial stability, while demonstrating the heightened vulnerability of women, particularly unmarried women, to poverty. The study underscores the need for gender-responsive poverty reduction strategies that address labour market inequalities, strengthen social protection, and recognise the diverse household structures that characterise contemporary South Africa.

Keywords: *gender, marital status, poverty, South Africa, feminist economics, household structure, logistic regression*

Introduction

Poverty remains one of the most persistent global challenges in the 21st century, disproportionately affecting women across regions and socioeconomic contexts (UN Women, 2024; World Bank Group, 2024). While global poverty has declined over recent decades, structural gender inequalities continue to shape individuals' exposure to economic vulnerability. According to the United Nations (2023), women aged 25–34 are approximately 25 percent more likely than men to live in extreme poverty, a disparity rooted in unequal access to labour markets,

discriminatory social norms, unpaid care work, and marital arrangements (United Nations, 2023). This demonstrates that poverty is not merely an economic condition but a gendered phenomenon in which household composition and marital status play a central role in shaping welfare outcomes (Chant, 2016; UN Women, 2024)

Across global contexts, research shows that marital status is strongly associated with economic well-being, though the direction and magnitude of its effects differ by gender. Marriage may provide economic stability through pooled resources, shared labour, and complementary responsibilities (Dunga,

2017); however, these benefits are often uneven for men and women due to gendered intra-household bargaining dynamics and unequal access to assets (Lundeberg & Pollak, 1996). Conversely, marital dissolution, through divorce, separation, or widowhood, tends to have more severe economic consequences for women, frequently precipitating sharp declines in income and living standards (Aassve et al., 2007). These patterns are closely linked to women's disproportionate childcare responsibilities and their weaker labour market positioning across many societies. Broadly women are overly represented in unpaid care work and hence increases their dependency on men.

Within Africa, the gendered dimensions of marital status and poverty are even more pronounced. Sub-Saharan Africa continues to exhibit some of the highest poverty rates globally, with female-headed households disproportionately represented among the poor (Mdluli & Dunga, 2022a). Structural barriers, including limited access to land, credit, formal employment, and legal protection, intersect with restrictive gender norms to deepen women's vulnerability (Doss et al., 2018). As a result, marital transitions and non-marital household formations often place women at significantly higher risk of poverty than men, transforming marital status into a key mechanism through which gender inequality is reproduced.

South Africa presents a distinctive case in this broader regional context. Despite being one of the continent's most industrialised economies, South Africa continues to grapple with deep-seated inequalities rooted in the legacy of apartheid, segmented labour markets, and persistent gender disparities (Seekings & Nattrass, 2005). Marriage rates have declined significantly, accompanied by increases in cohabitation, single-person households, and female-headed households, (D. Posel & Rudwick, 2014). These

demographic shifts intersect with high unemployment, gender wage gaps, and stark differences in asset ownership, placing women, particularly those who are unmarried, divorced, separated, or widowed, at heightened risk of poverty (Bertus Preller, 2024; Horton et al., 2016).

Despite this evidence, the gendered relationship between marital status and poverty in South Africa remains insufficiently examined using recent nationally representative data. Much of the existing literature relies on older surveys or focuses on household-level analyses without adequately exploring gender differences within marital status categories. This creates an empirical gap, especially considering recent socioeconomic shocks, evolving household structures, and persistent gender inequality.

Using the 2023 General Household Survey (GHS), a comprehensive dataset covering household demographics, income, employment, and living conditions, this study addresses the problem by examining how marital status influences poverty outcomes for men and women in South Africa. By applying a gendered analytical lens, the study investigates whether marital status categories (married, cohabiting, never married, divorced/separated, and widowed) shape poverty differently by gender, and the extent to which these effects reflect broader structural inequalities.

Accordingly, the study pursues three interrelated objectives:

- To examine the association between marital status and poverty in South Africa using GHS 2023 data.
- To analyse how this association differs between men and women, highlighting the gendered nature of poverty risks.

- To contribute updated empirical evidence to the literature on gender, household structure, and economic vulnerability in highly unequal contexts.

By integrating gender, marital dynamics, and poverty analysis, this study aims to inform policy debates on gender-responsive poverty reduction, social protection design, and strategies to support vulnerable household types in South Africa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between marital status and poverty has been the subject of extensive scholarly attention across disciplines including gender studies, labour economics, household economics, and development research. Much of the literature highlights that marital status is not a neutral demographic characteristic but a socially embedded factor that shapes individuals' access to resources, labour market opportunities, and social protection systems. Importantly, the literature consistently demonstrates that the poverty implications of marital status differ markedly by gender, (Chant, 2016; Kabeer, 2018).

Global Evidence on Marital status and poverty

Global studies show that marriage is often associated with economic advantages such as shared income, division of labour, economies of scale, and social support networks (Dunga, 2017; Zick & Smith, 1991). Married individuals, particularly men, tend to report stronger labour market outcomes, including higher earnings and greater employment stability, (Killewald & García-Manglano, 2016). However, the benefits of marriage are not equally distributed. Feminist economists argue that women's economic gains from marriage are diminished by gendered patterns of unpaid care work, labour market segregation, and

unequal bargaining power within households, (Folbre, 2006; Lundeberg & Pollak, 1996).

Marital dissolution which may include; divorce, separation, and widowhood, is widely acknowledged as a strong predictor of economic decline, especially for women (Brown et al., 2018). Numerous studies find that women experience larger and more persistent post-divorce income losses than men, (Aassve et al., 2007; Andreß et al., 2006). Widowed women, particularly in low, and middle-income countries, also face reductions in household income and loss of access to assets due to discriminatory inheritance practices (UN Women, 2024). Never-married mothers similarly face elevated poverty risk due to limited access to social protection and constrained employment opportunities that are exacerbated by the care demands of their infants, (McLanahan et al., 2004). Thus, the global evidence positions marital status as an important axis of vulnerability, with its impacts shaped by gender norms, welfare institutions, and labour market structures.

Marital status and poverty in Africa

Across sub-Saharan Africa, the literature highlights strong gender biases in the economic outcomes associated with marital status. Women, especially those heading households, are disproportionately represented among the poor (African Development Bank Group, 2015; Sisha, 2020). Female-headed households are often formed due to widowhood, divorce, labour migration of male partners, or non-marital fertility. These households frequently face limited access to productive assets such as land, livestock, and credit (Doss et al., 2018). Widowhood is particularly precarious for African women due to customary norms that restrict property rights and may lead to dispossession or "property grabbing" by relatives of the deceased spouse, (Peterman, 2012). Divorced and

separated women also tend to have less access to financial support, weaker labour market positions, and fewer opportunities for formal employment, (Kevane & Gray, 1999). Moreover, the persistence of patriarchal norms affects women's bargaining power within marriage and limits their ability to accumulate individual assets.

Studies on marital status and consumption poverty across African countries generally find that married men and women experience lower poverty rates relative to their unmarried counterparts, but the effect is more protective for men (Dunga & Sekatane, 2014; Mdluli & Dunga, 2022b). Conversely, single, divorced, and widowed women face disproportionately higher poverty risks. These patterns underscore the interaction between gender norms and institutional barriers that shape welfare outcomes across the region.

The South African Context

South Africa's literature provides a distinct and nuanced perspective, shaped by the country's unique socio-economic history and household dynamics. The legacy of apartheid led to fragmented family structures, extensive labour migration, and the widespread presence of stretched or non-nuclear households (Posel, 2001). Evidence consistently demonstrates that female-headed households are significantly more likely to experience poverty than their male-headed counterparts (Bhorat & Goga, 2012; 2016). Marriage rates have also declined substantially in recent decades, with fewer couples entering formal unions and more opting for cohabitation or remaining unmarried (Posel & Rudwick, 2014). This decline is partly linked to economic constraints—particularly male unemployment and financial insecurity—which reduce the feasibility of marriage (Hunter, 2010). Consequently, a large proportion of households are headed by single, divorced, separated, or widowed

women who often bear primary caregiving responsibilities with limited economic support.

Studies examining marital status and poverty in South Africa find that widowed and divorced women face elevated poverty risks due to loss of income, limited access to assets, and low labour force participation (Casale & Posel, 2010). Never-married women with children also experience high rates of multidimensional poverty (Rogan, 2016). The South African labour market is characterised by persistent gender wage gaps and high unemployment among women—structural factors that intensify the poverty effects of marital status transitions (Stats SA, 2021).

Despite these insights, much of the existing South African research relies on earlier datasets such as the 2010–2016 General Household Surveys or the National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS). There is limited updated research analysing post-pandemic dynamics, changing household structures, and gendered poverty outcomes using the latest 2023 General Household Survey (GHS) data.

Theoretical framework

Understanding the gendered relationship between marital status and poverty requires a conceptual framework that captures how gender norms, power relations, and institutional structures shape economic outcomes within and outside households. This study draws on three interrelated theoretical perspectives: Feminist Economics, Intra-Household Bargaining Theory, and the Capability Approach. Together, these frameworks offer a holistic lens through which to analyse how marital arrangements, gender roles, and socioeconomic structures influence poverty in South Africa.

Feminist Economics

Feminist economics challenges conventional economic models that assume households are unitary, harmonious decision-making units, instead arguing that gendered power relations and social norms influence resource allocation and well-being (Folbre, 2006; Kabeer, 2015). According to this perspective, marital status is not merely a demographic category but a social institution that structures individuals' access to economic resources, labour markets, and social protection systems. In many contexts, marriage reinforces gendered divisions of labour, with women performing the majority of unpaid care work, resulting in lower labour market participation and earnings (Chant, 2016).

Feminist economics also emphasises that women face structural constraints—including discrimination, limited property rights, and unequal access to assets—that increase their vulnerability to poverty, particularly when they are not married or experience marital dissolution (Doss et al., 2018). This framework is essential for interpreting gender differences in the economic implications of widowhood, divorce, separation, and singlehood.

Applied to South Africa, this perspective highlights how patriarchal norms, historical inequalities, and segmented labour markets combine to produce distinctive poverty risks for different marital groups.

Intra-Household Bargaining Theory

Intra-household bargaining theory, rooted in the work of Lundberg and Pollak (1996) and Sen (1990), argues that household members' well-being depends on bargaining power rather than collective utility maximisation. Bargaining power is shaped by individuals' access to assets, income, education, and alternatives outside the marriage (often referred to as the “fallback position”).

Key implications are:

- Married individuals do not necessarily share resources equally. Gendered differences in bargaining power often result in women receiving a smaller share of household resources despite contributing significantly through unpaid labour.
- Marital dissolution outcomes are gendered. Because women typically have weaker fallback positions—lower earnings, fewer assets, and greater childcare responsibilities—they experience more severe economic declines after divorce or separation (Aassve et al., 2007).
- Cohabitation vs. formal marriage matters. In South Africa, cohabiting unions offer weaker legal protection and inheritance rights, reducing women's bargaining power relative to formal marriage (Posel & Rudwick, 2014).
- Female-headed households result from reduced bargaining power or exit from unfavourable marital arrangements; these households often exhibit higher poverty rates.

This theory is particularly relevant in South Africa, where labour market inequalities and historical household fragmentation create vastly different fallback positions for men and women.

The capability Approach

Amartya Sen's Capability Approach provides an additional conceptual foundation by linking poverty to the deprivation of capabilities—individuals' real freedoms to lead the lives they value (Sen, 1999). From this perspective, marital status shapes capabilities in multiple ways:

- Marriage may expand capabilities through resource sharing, emotional support, and social recognition.
- However, for many women, marital institutions restrict capabilities, especially in contexts where gender norms limit autonomy, mobility, or access to economic opportunities, whether by traditions or by circumstances.
- Widowed, divorced, or single women may experience capability deprivation due to reduced income, care burdens, and weaker access to assets.
- Social norms around marriage and singlehood influence how society distributes opportunities and resources, affecting women's ability to pursue education, employment, and decision-making power.

The Capability Approach is particularly well suited to South Africa's multidimensional poverty context, where poverty encompasses not only income shortages but also deficits in education, employment, living conditions, and social autonomy (Rogan, 2016).

Taken together, these theories allow for a nuanced understanding of the gendered nexus between marital status and poverty: Feminist economics highlights the structural and institutional gender inequalities embedded in marital arrangements. Intra-household bargaining theory explains how resource allocation and post-marital economic outcomes differ for men and women. The Capability Approach broadens the analysis to consider how marital status expands or restricts individuals' freedoms and opportunities.

This integrated framework is especially pertinent for interpreting South African data, where marital patterns, labour market inequalities, and household structures intersect to produce complex gendered

poverty outcomes. The theories collectively justify examining poverty not simply by marital categories, but through a gendered lens that captures power relations, social norms, and structural inequalities shaping well-being.

Methods and data

This study employs a quantitative research design using microdata from the 2023 General Household Survey (GHS) conducted by Statistics South Africa. To examine the gendered relationship between marital status and poverty, the study uses a logistic regression (Logit) model, appropriate for binary outcome variables such as poverty status. Logistic regression allows for estimating how marital status categories influence the likelihood of being poor and how these effects differ between men and women.

The GHS 2023 is a nationally representative household survey that collected detailed information on demographics, education, employment, income, living conditions, and social protection. It used a stratified two-stage cluster sampling design, with enumeration areas selected at the first stage and households at the second stage. The dataset is widely used in socio-economic research due to its reliability, large sample size, and comprehensive coverage of South African households and it is freely available on the STATSSA website.

For this study, the analysis focuses on individuals aged 18 years and older, reflecting the population for whom marital status, labour market participation, and poverty status are most meaningfully defined.

Poverty is measured using the upper-bound poverty line (UBPL) defined by Statistics South Africa, which reflects the cost of basic food and essential non-food items. Individuals are classified as "poor" (1) if

their household income falls below the household upper bound poverty line UBPL, and “non-poor” (0) otherwise. This is calculated as follows

$$\sum_{i=1}^n y_i < (UBPL_j * HS) \\ = \text{poor household} \dots \dots (1)$$

$$\sum_{i=1}^n y_i > (PL_j * HS) \\ = \text{non - poor household} \dots \dots (2)$$

Model specification

Since the dependent variable is binary, the study uses a Logit model, which estimates the probability that individual *iii* is poor, conditional on marital status and other covariates.

The Logit model is specified as:

$$\log \left(\frac{P(Y_i = 1)}{1 - P(Y_i = 1)} \right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 MS_i \\ + \beta_2 G_i + \beta_3 MS_i * G_i \\ + \beta_4 X_i$$

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of Gender

gender	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Male	10927	56.47	56.47
Female	8424	43.53	100.00
Total	19351	100.00	

Table 2 discusses the poverty status of household head, it shows that 44.7% of the population falls below the upper-bound poverty line (UBPL), highlighting a significant level of deprivation in South Africa. This high poverty rate underscores the persistent structural and socio-economic

Where:

- $Y_i = 1$ if the household *i* is poor
- MS_i is the marital status categories
- MG_i is gender (1= female, 0 = Male)
- $MS_i * G_i$ is an interaction variable between marital status and gender
- X_i are control variables

Because the Logit coefficients are expressed in log-odds, the study will report the odds ratios and the average marginal effects.

Results and discussion

Descriptive statistics of the variables

The descriptive statistics provide an overview of the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the sample (N = 19,351). Table 1 shows that 56.47% of respondents are male and 43.53% are female. This distribution is consistent with national survey patterns, where sampling weights and household composition often result in slightly higher representation of males.

challenges that continue to undermine household well-being, despite ongoing policy efforts aimed at poverty reduction. The figure also provides an important baseline for examining how poverty varies across gender and marital groups in subsequent analyses.

Table 2 Poverty status UBPL

	Frequency	Percent	Cum.
Non Poor	10701	55.30	55.30

Poor	8650	44.70	100.00
Total	19351	100.00	

Table 3 presents result of marital status distribution of household head which reveals meaningful demographic patterns. Approximately 30.8% of individuals are legally married, while 36.3% are single. A notable 17.3% of respondents are widowed, reflecting demographic ageing and mortality

patterns in South Africa. Cohabiting unions constitute 10.7%, while divorced (3.4%) and separated (1.6%) groups together account for fewer than 5%. These categories are important as they correspond to distinct household structures and income-pooling arrangements.

Table 3 Descriptive distribution of Marital status

Marital Status	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Legally Married	5958	30.79	30.79
Living together	2067	10.68	41.47
Divorced	659	3.41	44.88
Separated	307	1.59	46.46
Widow	3340	17.26	63.72
Single	7020	36.28	100.00
Total	19351	100.00	

Table 4 Descriptive distribution of Employment status

Employment status two	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Employed	9435	48.76	48.76
Unemployed	2466	12.74	61.50
Not economically active	7446	38.48	99.98
Not applicable	4	0.02	100.00
Total	19351	100.00	

Employment status also reflects strong vulnerability table 4 results shows that only 48.8% of the sample is employed, while 12.7% are unemployed and 38.5% are not

economically active. High levels of unemployment and non-economic activity heighten the risk of poverty, especially for women and single-headed households.

Table 5 Population group of household head

Population group of household head	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
African/Black	16221	83.83	83.83
Coloured	1546	7.99	91.81
Indian/Asian	376	1.94	93.76
White	1208	6.24	100.00
Total	19351	100.00	

In terms of population group, table 5 results shows that 83.8% of respondents are African/Black, a distribution that aligns closely with South Africa's national demographic profile.

Interpretation of the Two Logistic Regression Models

Two logistic regression models were estimated to examine the relationship between gender, marital status, and poverty.

Model 1, which included only gender and marital status, shows strong and statistically significant associations between these variables and poverty. Women display higher odds of experiencing poverty than men, and all non-married groups—single, divorced, separated, widowed, and cohabiting individuals—have significantly higher poverty risks relative to those who are legally married. These unconditional results highlight the raw disparities that exist across gender and marital categories.

Model 2, which incorporates key socioeconomic and demographic controls (race, employment status, education, household size, and age), refines this picture. The introduction of controls reduces—but does not eliminate—the effect of gender, indicating that much of the gender gap in poverty is mediated by structural inequalities such as labour market

disadvantage and differential access to economic resources. Marital status remains a strong predictor even after adjustment: single, divorced, widowed, separated, and cohabiting individuals continue to exhibit significantly higher odds of poverty than married individuals. This persistence suggests that marital unions still offer important economic benefits in South Africa, likely through income pooling and shared household responsibilities. Overall, the controlled model demonstrates that while socioeconomic variables help explain part of the observed disparities, marital status and gender independently and substantially shape individuals' likelihood of being poor.

The results were presented as follows

Model 1 Table 6.

The baseline model shows a strong gendered pattern in poverty. Women have significantly higher odds of being poor compared to men (OR = 2.189; $p < 0.01$). This aligns with existing evidence that women are more vulnerable to economic hardship due to gendered labour market disadvantages and disproportionate care responsibilities.

Relative to legally married individuals, all marital categories except divorce and separation show significantly higher odds of

poverty. Living together (OR = 1.824; $p < 0.01$), widowhood (OR = 1.534; $p < 0.01$), and singlehood (OR = 1.334; $p < 0.01$) are particularly associated with heightened poverty risks.

Notably, interaction terms between gender and marital status reveal that for women in some categories (e.g., legally married and living together), the odds of being poor are lower than for their male counterparts, suggesting that married women may sometimes benefit from shared household

income, although this requires cautious interpretation. For divorced women (OR = 0.612; $p < 0.01$), the odds of poverty are significantly lower than divorced men, which may reflect gendered social support systems within extended families.

Overall, Model 1 confirms that both gender and marital status are significant predictors of poverty, but their effects vary across categories.

Table 6. Logistic regression results

PSUBPL	Coef.	St.Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
gender : base Male	1	.	.	.	.	.	.
Female	2.189	.107	16.03	0	1.989	2.41	***
Marital Status : b~a	1	.	.	.	.	.	.
Living together	1.824	.104	10.52	0	1.631	2.041	***
Divorced	.852	.132	-1.03	.301	.63	1.154	
Separated	1.107	.227	0.49	.621	.741	1.654	
Widow	1.534	.135	4.85	0	1.291	1.824	***
Single	1.334	.063	6.12	0	1.216	1.462	***
: base All males	1	.	.	.	.	.	.
Legally married fe~e	.838	.074	-1.99	.046	.704	.997	**
living together fe~e	.725	.092	-2.54	.011	.566	.929	**
divorced female	.612	.115	-2.61	.009	.424	.884	***
separated female	1.277	.324	0.96	.335	.777	2.099	
widow female	.829	.086	-1.81	.071	.677	1.016	*
60	1	.	.	.	.	.	.
Constant	.471	.014	-25.05	0	.444	.499	***
Mean dependent var		0.447	SD dependent var			0.497	
Pseudo r-squared		0.034	Number of obs			19351	
Chi-square		907.110	Prob > chi2			0.000	

Akaike crit. (AIC) 25725.279 Bayesian crit. (BIC) 25819.725

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

Model 2 Table 7.

After controlling for race, employment status, education, age, and household size, gender remains a significant predictor of poverty. Table 7 regression results indicate that women continue to face higher odds of being poor (OR = 1.396; $p < 0.01$), although the reduction in magnitude relative to the uncontrolled model indicates that part of the gender gap is mediated by structural factors such as differential access to employment and education. Marital status also remains strongly associated with poverty. Relative to legally married individuals, those who are living together (OR = 1.60; $p < 0.01$), divorced (OR = 1.63; $p < 0.01$), widowed (OR = 1.41; $p < 0.01$), and single (OR = 1.57; $p < 0.01$) all exhibit significantly higher odds of poverty, while separation (OR = 1.38; $p > 0.05$) is not statistically significant. The control variables behave in expected ways: employment status is the strongest predictor, with the unemployed (AME = 0.402) and non-economically

active (AME = 0.250) showing substantially higher poverty probabilities. Education is strongly protective, as secondary (OR = 0.573; $p < 0.01$) and tertiary education (OR = 0.162; $p < 0.01$) significantly reduce poverty risk. Race also plays a major role, with Coloured, Indian/Asian, and White individuals experiencing significantly lower odds of poverty compared with African/Black respondents. Household size increases poverty likelihood (AME = 0.064; $p < 0.01$), reflecting resource dilution, while age slightly reduces poverty risk (AME = -0.004), consistent with lifecycle improvements in economic stability. Once controls are added, gender-marital status interaction terms lose significance, suggesting that socioeconomic conditions explain much of the gendered variation within marital groups. The explanatory power of the model improves markedly, with the pseudo R^2 rising from 0.034 to 0.269 after adding controls.

Table 7 Logistic regression

PSUBPL	Coef.	St.Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% Conf	Interval]	Sig
gender : base Male	1	.	.	.	.	.	
Female	1.396	.085	5.50	0	1.24	1.573	***
Marital Status : b~a	1	.	.	.	.	.	
Living together	1.599	.111	6.74	0	1.395	1.833	***
Divorced	1.628	.297	2.67	.007	1.139	2.327	***
Separated	1.383	.322	1.39	.164	.876	2.184	
Widow	1.413	.149	3.27	.001	1.149	1.738	***
Single	1.569	.103	6.86	0	1.379	1.785	***
: base All males	1	.	.	.	.	.	
Legally married fe~e	.952	.107	-0.44	.663	.765	1.186	
living together fe~e	.774	.118	-1.68	.093	.573	1.044	*
divorced female	.577	.128	-2.47	.013	.373	.893	**
seperated female	1.351	.395	1.03	.303	.762	2.395	
widow female	.96	.117	-0.34	.735	.756	1.218	
Population group o~e	1	.	.	.	.	.	
Coloured	.435	.029	-	0	.382	.496	***

			12.5 2				
Indian/Asian	.212	.04	-8.19	0	.146	.307	***
White	.188	.025	-	0	.145	.245	***
			12.4 8				
Employment status	1	.	.	.	.	.	
~p Unemployed	8.987	.537	36.7	0	7.995	10.103	***
			8				
Not economically	3.828	.176	29.1	0	3.497	4.189	***
a~e			3				
Broader categoriza~t	1	.	.	.	.	.	
Primary	.93	.063	-1.07	.284	.814	1.062	
Secondary	.573	.037	-8.66	0	.505	.65	***
tertiary and higher	.162	.014	-	0	.137	.193	***
			20.6 1				
head_age	.973	.002	-	0	.97	.977	***
			16.1 2				
HHsize	1.47	.015	37.9	0	1.441	1.5	***
			6				
Constant	.494	.061	-5.74	0	.389	.629	***
Mean dependent var		0.447	SD dependent var			0.497	
Pseudo r-squared		0.269	Number of obs			19347	
Chi-square		7162.740	Prob > chi2			0.000	
Akaike crit. (AIC)		19483.207	Bayesian crit. (BIC)			19656.353	

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

Table 8

Delta-method

	dy/dx	std.	err.	z	P>z	[95% conf.
gender						
Female	.		(not		estimable)	
MS						
Living together	0.078	0.012	6.720	0.000	0.056	0.101
Divorced	0.082	0.031	2.640	0.008	0.021	0.142
Separated	0.054	0.039	1.370	0.169	-0.023	

						0.131
Widow	0.058	0.018	3.230	0.001	0.023	0.092
Single	0.075	0.011	6.870	0.000	0.054	0.097
Gender MS						
Legally married female	.		(not		estimable)	
living together female	.		(not		estimable)	
divorced female	.		(not		estimable)	
separated female	.		(not		estimable)	
widow female	.		(not		estimable)	
single female	.		(not		estimable)	
head_popgrp						
Coloured	-0.140	0.011	-13.310	0.000	-0.160	- 0.119
Indian/Asian	-0.243	0.024	-9.930	0.000	-0.291	- 0.195
White	-0.257	0.017	-15.310	0.000	-0.290	- 0.224
employ_Status2						
Unemployed	0.402	0.010	40.940	0.000	0.383	0.421
Not economically active	0.250	0.008	30.050	0.000	0.233	0.266
Not applicable	.		(not		estimable)	
education_categorised_broad						
Primary	-0.013	0.012	-1.070	0.283	-0.037	0.011
Secondary	-0.100	0.012	-8.610	0.000	-0.123	-

						0.078
tertiary and higher	-0.300	0.014	-21.420	0.000	-0.328	- 0.273
head_age	-0.004	0.000	-16.520	0.000	-0.005	- 0.004
HHsize	0.064	0.001	44.100	0.000	0.061	 0.067

Note: dy/dx for factor levels is the discrete change from the base level.

Interpretation of Marginal Effects (Table 8)

The marginal effects presented in Table 8 provide an intuitive assessment of how each predictor influences the probability of being poor. Marital status shows strong and statistically significant effects for most categories. Relative to legally married individuals, those living together (dy/dx = 0.078; $p < 0.001$), divorced (0.082; $p = 0.008$), widowed (0.058; $p = 0.001$), and single (0.075; $p < 0.001$) all have substantially higher predicted probabilities of experiencing poverty. Separation, while positive (0.054), is not statistically significant ($p = 0.169$), indicating no reliable difference from married individuals. Gender-specific marginal effects could not be estimated due to reference category restrictions.

Population group effects reveal pronounced racial inequalities. Relative to African/Black respondents, coloured (-0.140), Indian/Asian (-0.243), and White (-0.257) individuals have significantly lower probabilities of being poor (all $p < 0.001$), reflecting South Africa's historically embedded socioeconomic disparities.

Employment status emerges as one of the strongest predictors. The unemployed (0.402; $p < 0.001$) and those not economically active (0.250; $p < 0.001$) have sharply higher probabilities of poverty,

underscoring the centrality of labour market exclusion in shaping economic vulnerability.

Education has a protective effect that increases with attainment. Secondary education (-0.100; $p < 0.001$) and tertiary/higher education (-0.300; $p < 0.001$) significantly reduce the probability of poverty, while primary education shows no significant effect. These patterns align with established links between human capital and economic well-being.

Age and household size also behave as expected. Older household heads have slightly lower poverty risk (dy/dx = -0.004; $p < 0.001$), consistent with lifecycle improvements in income stability. In contrast, larger households face higher poverty risk (0.064; $p < 0.001$), reflecting resource dilution as household size increases.

Overall, the marginal effects confirm that marital status, race, employment, education, household size, and age all exert substantial and statistically meaningful influences on poverty likelihood, reinforcing the structural and demographic determinants highlighted in the regression models.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that legally married individuals experience significantly lower poverty rates than those in other marital categories. Cohabiting, single, divorced, and widowed individuals all face substantially higher risks of poverty, even after controlling for socio-demographic factors. These results underscore the continued economic importance of marriage as a mechanism for resource pooling, shared household labour, and financial stability. At the same time, they reflect the socioeconomic disadvantages that accompany marital dissolution or the absence of a marital partnership.

Gender disparities remain pronounced. Women are consistently more likely to be poor than men across most marital categories, although the magnitude of this gap narrows once employment, education, and other structural factors are controlled for. This suggests that gendered labour market inequalities—rather than marital status alone—are key drivers of women's heightened vulnerability. High unemployment, unequal access to well-paying jobs, and disproportionate care responsibilities limit women's economic opportunities, reinforcing gendered patterns of poverty.

The study also highlights that race, education, household size, and employment status strongly mediate poverty outcomes. These factors operate alongside marital status to produce intersectional vulnerabilities that disproportionately affect

women, particularly those who are single, widowed, or divorced. In this sense, marital status cannot be isolated from the broader social and economic context in which individuals make household and labour market decisions.

Overall, the results reinforce theoretical insights from feminist economics, intra-household bargaining theory, and the capability approach: poverty is shaped not only by household structure but also by gendered power relations, unequal access to resources, and societal norms that influence economic opportunities. The findings contribute updated empirical evidence in a post-pandemic context, demonstrating that marital status continues to be a critical determinant of economic well-being in South Africa, but its effects are deeply intertwined with structural gender inequalities.

Future research should explore how cultural norms, intra-household decision-making, and access to social protection influence the marital status–poverty relationship. Longitudinal data could further clarify how transitions into and out of marriage shape poverty dynamics over time. Nonetheless, the current analysis provides a strong empirical foundation for designing gender-sensitive poverty reduction strategies tailored to the diverse needs of South Africa's evolving household structures.

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