

## An Ethical Evaluation of Idoma Women's Inheritance Culture

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The Idoma people of Benue State in North Central Nigeria are known to be people with varied cultural practices just like many other societies in Nigeria. However, the cultural practice of interest in this paper is the one on inheritance as it particularly relates to the female gender. According to the practice, women do not have any share in the property of the family in which they belong and also contributed in it's acquisition. The case is worse if they become widows as they are subjected to all obnoxious widowhood practices. This culture of denying, women inheritance rights is a reflection of their notion of womanhood where the philosophy of patriarchy holds sway and women are subjected to a near servile status. It is on this premise that this paper which is an ethical evaluation of Idoma women's inheritance culture was written. In doing this, the researcher employed qualitative research method to obtain vital information through oral interviews and existing literature to highlight as contained herein, the various responses given by the different categories of people interviewed. Those interviewed included custodians of Idoma culture such as chiefs and heads of families. Women, especially widows, who are mainly at the receiving ends were interviewed and some civil servants such as principal women Development Officers and Local Government Social Welfare Officers in the four Local Government Areas selected as the case study were interviewed. The findings from the responses as to why Idoma women are denied inheritance rights include fear of widows carrying the properties of their late husbands' to new homes in the event of remarriage which is similar to the reason advanced for denying spinsters inheritance rights, accusation for being responsible for the husbands' deaths, revenge for unruly behavior of the wives. The various responses were subjected to ethical evaluation by the researcher to determine whether the actions were right or wrong in accordance to ethical principles. The paper further highlighted the effects of the culture on various categories of people and the resultant effect on the Idoma society. Issues of gender parity and ethical disposition to women inheritance were also highlighted with far reaching recommendations and conclusion among which is the necessity for the paramount ruler of Idoma (Och'Idoma) to call for a meeting of his council of chiefs to discuss the issue of inheritance by Idoma women. This is to enable the chiefs carry the message of gender equity to their various domains with a view to extricating the female gender from the age long culture of subjugation especially that of denying women inheritance rights and the necessity for wives to relate well with their husbands' people when the husbands were alive etc.*

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

This paper is an ethical evaluation of Idoma Women's Inheritance Culture necessitated the researcher going into the field to interact with and interview various categories of people, including Local Government Workers such as Principal women development officers, social welfare officers, traditional rulers (second class chiefs) and clan heads. Others interviewed were five randomly selected members of the following groups which include widows, heads of family units, married women, orphans, spinsters, commercial sex workers and people with disabilities. The interview was carried out in two settlements (Local Government Headquarters and a village) in each of the four local government areas selected for this study from the seven core Idoma speaking Local Government Areas. The four local government areas selected are Ado, Apa, Ogbadibo and Otukpo which is based on geographical spread to make the study representative.

The interviewees' responses are analysed and subjected to ethical evaluation with a view to determining whether these actions are right or wrong. The paper is therefore subdivided into the following sections for readability, lucidity and better appreciation of the subject matter thus; field data analysis, effects of the inheritance culture on widows and orphans, effects on other women and their children, effects on the relationship between the families of the spouses, synthesis of these effects on Idoma society, gender parity and ethical disposition to women's inheritance, recommendations and conclusion.

## 2. FIELD DATA ANALYSIS ON IDOMA WOMEN'S INHERITANCE CULTURE

The total sample population interviewed via qualitative research method was one hundred and fifty six. The focus of the interview was to investigate the culture of inheritance among Idoma people, where women (both single and married) are denied inheritance rights to properties, either of their fathers or their late husbands' as they become widows. The responses got from the individuals and groups varied but were to some extent related to one another in principles, even though some respondents gave more than one reason why this culture is practised. Some of the widows interviewed narrated their experiences and availed the researcher some of the reasons given when they were being sent out of their late husbands' homes without any property given to them. The respondents gave various reasons summing up to ten, the summary which is shown in table 1 below:

*Table 1: Summary of Responses Advancing Reasons for denying Idoma women inheritance rights in descending order of magnitude.*

| Code | Reasons advanced  | Frequency | Percentage of Responses. | Percentage of Respondents |
|------|---|-----------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| i.   | Fear of widows taking the late husband's properties to a new home in the event of remarriage                | 146       | 11.7%                    | 93.6                      |
| ii.  | Women seen as properties/slaves   | 140       | 11.2%                    | 89.7%                     |
| iii. | Accusation for being responsible for the husband's death  | 140       | 11.2%                    | 89.7%                     |
| iv.  | Burial of wives in their fathers' homes depicting that the wives partially belong to the husbands' families | 137       | 11.0%                    | 87.8%                     |
| v.   | Adultery  | 135       | 10.8%                    | 86.5%                     |
| vi.  | Fear of daughters taking family properties to their husbands' houses when they eventually get married       | 127       | 10.2%                    | 81.4%                     |

|       |  |      |      |       |
|-------|--|------|------|-------|
| vii.  | Revenge for the wives unruly attitude towards husbands' people when the late was alive | 122  | 9.8% | 78.2% |
| viii. | Barrenness   | 114  | 9.2% | 73.1% |
| ix.   | Not giving birth to male children  | 95   | 7.6% | 60.9% |
| x.    | Outright hatred  | 89   | 7.1% | 57.1% |
|       | Total frequency  | 1245 |      | 156   |

Keys:

$$\frac{\text{Responses}}{\text{Total Response}} \times \frac{100}{1} \quad (\text{i.e. } \frac{\text{frequency}}{1245} \times \frac{100}{1})$$

$$\frac{\text{Respondents}}{\text{Total number interviewees}} \times \frac{100}{1} \quad (\text{ie. } \frac{\text{Frequency}}{156} \times \frac{100}{1})$$

The adduced reason with the highest frequency which is 93% is that of the fear of widows taking the properties of the late husband to new homes in case of remarriage, if they were allowed to inherit the properties of their late husbands. This reason is quite plausible and is not peculiar to Idoma people. It is similar to that given to deny the daughters of Zelophehad inheritance (Numbers 36: 1-13). Although these daughters of Zelophehad were not widows, the issue at stake here is that of transfer of properties from one domain to another which is being used by the Idoma people to deny women, especially widows, inheritance. As cogent as this reason may seem to be, the researcher is of the opinion that it is just a smoke screen as many of the widows who have been denied inheritance never contemplated remarrying, as many of them are old and post menopausal, while those who are young are never given opportunity to air their views in this respect. This assertion is corroborated by Onyeche Audu, a widow, that, while she was in the village mourning the death of her husband within the seven days of his burial, the husband's relatives went to the house in the city where she and her husband were living and carted away all their properties without her knowledge and left nothing for her and her three children who were still minors. This action is not peculiar to the lady in question but is common place among the Idoma people which is clearly a violation of the provision of part V pg 7 of Idoma native marriage law and custom order which stipulates that, when a woman is bereaved of her husband, after 12 months of mourning, she is given option to decide if she will remain and undergo levirate marriage or leave for her father's house on the condition that her father will refund fully the dowry earlier paid by her deceased husband or the dowry earlier paid on her is refunded by the new husband to the family of her late husband. This means that the widow is now being sent to her new husband's home by the family of her late husband and therefore should be accorded the privileges that are due to a daughter going to her husband's home. From this exposition it is clearly unethical to deny widows inheritance rights simply for fear of taking the properties of the late husband elsewhere, when the stipulated rules have not been complied with. It is also a violation of Article 21 of ACHPR as corroborated by Emery V. that a widow shall have the right to an equitable share in the inheritance of her husband's properties to live in her matrimonial house in case of remarriage, she shall retain this right if the house belongs to her or she has inherited it (31).

Another reason next in frequency adduced by the respondents which is 89.7% is that, they are seen as properties and slaves, so cannot inherit since "Properties" and slaves don't have right to any inheritance. This line of argument, according to Abuh Achigili, an

autogenarian, is premised on the fact that before a girl is married out, the father takes money (dowry) in exchange for her and that only properties and slaves are traded in that format.

Another reason, same in frequency with the one immediately discussed above, is the accusation that wives are responsible for their husband's death. It is believed that if a wife was responsible for her husband's death, she should be denied any access to the late husband's properties to deter other wives from doing so. Some ambitious women, according to Gabriel Ogaga (oral interview) from Utonkon in Ado Local Government, would go out of their ways to kill their husbands in order to inherit their properties. The belief that the demise of every husband must be in the hands of a bewitching wife is common place in many African societies, as according to Erinoshio I. "in many societies in Nigeria, no man dies naturally, but at the hands of a bewitching wife" (11). The researcher while not contending with the possibility of this happening argues that, the general belief that the death of every husband must be caused by his wife is preposterous, especially when the men are never accused similarly even when all the odds are against them regarding the death of their wives. The researcher therefore sees the denial of widows' inheritance as a punishment for being responsible for the death of their husbands as unethical, for what is good for the goose, is good for the gander. This submission is in line with Confucious' ethical principle usually referred to as his golden rule, "What you do not like when done to yourself, do not to others" Jenkins (54).

Another reason given by the interviewees as to why women, especially widows, are denied inheritance of their late husbands' properties is their burial in their fathers' homes instead of their husbands' homes forms 87.8% of the total respondents, implying that the wife did not totally belong to the husband's people. The argument is that why should somebody whose corpse would finally be conveyed to a different location for burial be allowed to inherit?. It is true that among the Idoma people, culture dictates that wives upon their death are buried in their father's homes, that their spirits need to go and rest with the spirit of their ancestors and also that the heads of wives are not given to husbands but only the buttocks. There are exceptions to this rule as according to Ado Echeipu (oral interview) that if a close relative of the woman's father resides in the same village where the daughter is married, the children of the woman can make passionate appeal to their father's people to allow the corpse of their mother to be buried in her matrimonial home as a reverence given to that relative residing there. The consent is however not usually given on a platter of gold, but after so many emissaries and due homage. Using this reason as an excuse to deny women (wives) inheritance rights is ethically wrong, as it is not the women that evolved this cultural practice and therefore should not be victims of an age long culture. If the Idoma people see it as offensive to bury wives in their fathers' homes to warrant denying women right to inheritance which ordinarily should be part of their fundamental human rights, especially as many wives contribute in the acquisition of these properties, then this cultural practice should be changed for culture ought to be dynamic after all.

There is hope at the end of the tunnel as chief Emmanuel Ode (Ada Ogbadibo) the Second Class Chief of Ogbadibo Local Government Area, confirmed to the researcher that the culture of burying wives in their fathers' home has actually become obsolete, and that he was making every effort along with his Council of Chiefs to change the practice in his domain, since culture is dynamic. Denying women inheritance for the above reason is viewed by the researcher as disrespect for human dignity and a violation of ethical principle of respect as advanced by Kant. According to Kant's ethical principle of respect, all persons are owed respect just because they are persons, free and rational beings <https://plato.stanford.edu>.

Adultery is another reason obtained from the field for denying Idoma women inheritance rights to their late husbands' properties which is 86.5% of the total respondents.

This reason and the accusation that wives are usually responsible for the deaths of their husbands are like Siamese twins, as Idoma people believe that, any act of adultery on the part of the wife will result in the death of her husband. Francis Audu an indigene of Otukpa in Ogbadibo Local Government Area, in an oral interview with the researcher gave an exposition that if a wife commits adultery and cooks for the husband to eat, the husband would die, especially if he is aware and refuses to expose her. He went further to say that strange illnesses such as swelling of the husband's stomach coupled with other inexplicable disease syndromes brought about by 'alekwu' (ancestral spirit) would normally precede the husband's death. For this reason Idoma men guard their wives jealously and would not hesitate to cause her to swear to an oath if he has any cause to suspect her of adultery. It is true that the success of every marriage is largely hinged on trust, faithfulness and fidelity but some salient questions that agitate the mind of the researcher with respect to the Idoma culture is its lopsidedness to the extent that, while adultery on the side of the wife is viewed with utmost gravity, it is rather treated with kid gloves if the husband is accused. As mentioned earlier in this study, adultery on the side of the husband is excused to be the polygamous nature of man.

Another puzzle that the researcher could not unravel is the transferred punishment of death by *alekwu* to the husband for an offence of adultery committed by his wife. One would have thought that it is the wife who committed the adultery that the repercussion should be upon in line with the popular proverb among the Idoma people that "*Abo no wogo a nena ice aa*" meaning it is the hand that enters the hole that the scorpion stings. This is also in line with the biblical teaching that says "it is the soul that sinneth that must die" (Ezekiel 18: 20).

The researcher is of the view that, adultery should be viewed with grave concern not only on the side of the wife but also on the side of the husband for equity and justice, for the progress of the Idoma society. The patriarchal philosophy which tends to throw societal ethical principles to the winds to perpetuate male hegemony should be avoided. Akor Udala an indigene of Ilaba Ugboju who is resident in Makurdi admits that Idoma people also frown at adultery on the part of men, but are usually not highlighted like that of the women. This view corroborates the earlier view of the researcher when she likened the behavior of the Idoma people to that of the Jews (Pharisees) who brought the adulterous woman to Jesus so that she could be stoned to death, while the man who committed the act with her was left alone (John 8: 3-11). This behavior was totally unethical, as the law stipulates punishment by stoning for both (Deuteronomy 22:22). Denying Idoma women inheritance on the ground of adultery is therefore unethical, as it violates Plato's and Aristotle's ethical principle of justice. According to Plato and Aristotle, justice means goodness as well as willingness to obey laws. It is the ideal of perfection in human relationships, and the spirit which animates men in proper discharge of their duties. The promotion of balance and harmony in thought and action <https://www.bu.edu/Ancishan>. One of the most fundamental ethical principles of justice is that given by Aristotle more than 2000 years ago, and it states; "equals should be treated equally and unequal, unequally" <https://www.scu.edu/ethics>.

The researcher believes that all human beings are created equal and have inalienable rights, therefore treating equals as unequal as is done in Idoma women inheritance culture violates this ethical principle. This unequal treatment especially in the area of adultery meted out to women is not peculiar to Idoma as a scenario in Genesis 38:1-30 revealed the story of Judah an Israelite who slept with his widow daughter in-law thinking she was a prostitute. When he discovered that the woman was pregnant, he ordered that she should be burnt to death. Sylvia Dejong summarizes the story in a book titled; "Widows of the Old Testament" by highlighting that the widow was only saved from being burnt when she tendered the seal and its cord as well as the staff given to her by Judah, as a pledge pending when he would

send her the goat he promised her. It was then that Judah had to admit that she was more righteous than he.

The fear of daughters taking their families' properties to their husbands' houses in the event of marriage which is 81.4% of the total respondents is given among the reasons for denying Idoma women inheritance rights. This reason is similar to that given for denying widows inheritance as earlier mentioned, that is the fear of widows taking their late husbands' properties to the new husbands' home in the event of remarriage. This phobia of inheritance transfer led to the practice of Jewish ladies marrying their kinsmen as occasioned by Zelophehad's daughters saga as mentioned earlier in this study (Numbers 36:1-13). This culture of denying daughters inheritance sometimes goes beyond palpable properties, as some fathers deny their daughters access to Western education as they consider it a waste of money training a daughter, who will eventually get married to another family. This line of thought is quite erroneous and myopic, as many educated married women among the Idoma people are known to be taking good care of their parents, and some have even influenced their well-to-do husbands to take care of their (wives) parents.

As mentioned earlier in this study, there is a little bit of flexibility among the Yoruba of Ondo State in South Western Nigeria, as their daughters are allowed to inherit properties along with their male children, a practice which is known in Yoruba as "*ori oju ori*" meaning equality among children (Iruonagbe 2009). Among the Igbo people of South Eastern Nigeria, daughters are generally not allowed to inherit properties except when they choose not to marry and decide to remain in their fathers' homes with a view to raising children there (Ezeilo, J. (253). This practice is just a means to an end, as it is aimed at preventing the extinction of the family name. when the head of the family dies without any male child to inherit, the daughter in question remains in the family house with legal rights to the properties until she gives birth to her own children who will actually answer the family name and in due time succeed her if they are male in line with the rule of primogeniture. Even though the traditional Idoma society does not allow daughters to inherit due to the reason given above, the researcher discovers that in many modern homes, equal opportunities are being given to all children irrespective of their gender. The researcher views this paradigm shift from the status-quo-ante as the way to go since the traditional practice was discriminatory and violates the ethical principle of equal rights and justice.

Another reason given for denying women especially widows, is revenge for their unruly attitude towards the husbands' people while the husband was alive which is 78.2% of the total respondents. This is common in modern homes where the couples live in cities, and relatives of the husband visit them or children especially girls are sent to them with the intention of being given western education. The prevalent scenario is, instead of these children being sent to school, they are converted to houseboys and house girls, street hawkers and are subjected to all sorts of domestic violence. Some are even given permanent deformities. It is also not uncommon to hear wives calling their mothers-in-laws witches and always antagonize them. This set of wives are also accused of being very hostile to their husbands' people when they visit, but welcome their own people very well when they do visit. This sort of behavior creates great anger and animosity in the minds of the husbands' relatives to revenge by dispossessing such wives of all properties upon the demise of their husbands. Igboti Omonu an indigene of Udoburu Owukpa corroborates these happenings as he sighted examples of many families that have experienced this scenario. Sunday Okojoku an indigene of Oiji resident in Makurdi was more specific when he narrated the story of a house wife who in the year 1990 deformed her husband's niece by fetching coal fire into the palm of the eleven (11) year old girl and tied the hands together on the accusation that she broke her plate in the kitchen. The matter was settled as a family issue, but the husband's

family members kept it in mind and fifteen years later (2005) when the husband died she was paid back in her own coin by dispossessing her of all the properties and also sent her packing. As justifiable as this reason seems to be, the researcher views it as incompatible with Christian ethical principle of forgiveness as Christians are admonished to love their enemies as vengeance is God's (Romans 12:14-21).

The researcher is also of the view that those who carry out any act of domestic violence should be reported to the law enforcement agencies for prosecution as legal frameworks such as the Benue State Law to prohibit all forms of violence against persons in private and public life are now available for use.

Women who are barren 73.1% of the respondents in their matrimonial homes go through all sorts of dehumanization even while their husbands are still alive. They are taunted and called all sorts of derogatory names, including witches, strangers (Ugboga) in Idoma as they are seen not to have any stake since they have no children that will perpetuate the family name, this set of women are often threatened of being sacked from their matrimonial homes at flimsy excuses. As comments such as: what is even weighing you down here is often thrown at them. The comment is based on a popular Idoma axiom "Oyi wodo" meaning a child is a weight that holds one down to the extent that, when women are maltreated in their matrimonial homes, they will not contemplate divorce for the sake of their children.

The situation becomes worse for a barren woman when she becomes a widow. If widows who have children are denied inheritance rights, that of a barren widow can only be imagined. The fundamental issue the researcher had to contend with in the field was the belief and conclusion by the people that childlessness is wholly the fault of the wives without giving any room for medical investigation of the husband. The judgment is only based on patriarchal sentiments devoid of scientific knowledge. This is perhaps why Plato in his ethical theory (Platonism) states that "evil is due to lack of knowledge and that if people know what is right, they will not act wickedly" (Popkin R.H & Avium R. S. pg 5). Despite the many shortcomings of Platonism, the researcher is of the view that the Idoma people should seek knowledge so that their actions will be guided by ethical principles based on scientific knowledge. It has been scientifically proved that anything that can lead to barrenness whether due to infertility or sterility can be the fault of either of the partners or both.

It is not totally surprising to deny women inheritance rights as a result of not giving birth to male children which is 60.9% of the total respondents since the Idoma society like many other African societies is patriarchal and believes that is the male children that perpetuate their family names. What is surprising and baffling to the researcher however is the revelation through scientific knowledge that even though, children are gifts from God the ability to cause the birth of either a male or female child is dependent on the man. According to Doctor Victor Ochefu Akpa via oral interview, it is the man who has the ability to release either X or Y chromosomes during coition and the woman can only release X chromosomes. He revealed further that if the man releases Y chromosomes and it unites with x chromosome released by the woman then it will result to a male child. From this scientific revelation, it is a travesty of justice to deny women inheritance as a result of not giving birth to male children. It is perhaps in tandem with Plato's theory that "men act wickedly for lack of knowledge", but Plato was quick to advise people to seek knowledge to avoid ignorance as it is a common dictum that ignorance of the law is not an excuse.

Martha Abiye Akoje, a former Principal Women's Development Officer with Apa Local Government Area informed the researcher in the course of the field work that, some of the issues she attended to in collaboration with the local government social welfare officer, were those of domestic violence without definite and overt reasons. She went further to say that, some women claimed that their husbands' relatives just hated them for no definite

reason. She narrated a particular case she intervened but to no avail, where the husband's relatives ganged up and forced her out of her matrimonial home without allowing her to carry a pin. All attempts to broker peace failed, and the problem finally led to a divorce. The above scenario is common among the Idoma, as it is culturally believed that a woman is not only married to her husband but also to the family members, although sexual relationship with her is the exclusive preserve of the husband, and this paves way for extended family members to intrude in the affairs of the couple. This communal living is not always bad especially when utilized positively.

### **3 EFFECTS OF THE INHERITANCE CULTURE ON WIDOWS AND ORPHANS**

The lives of widows and orphans are generally pathetic for obvious reasons, including the loss of their breadwinners and agony attendant with it. There is no gainsaying that their lives become more pathetic and miserable when denied inheritance rights of their late husbands' and fathers' properties.

Effects of denying widows inheritance can best be appreciated by considering the life story of a widow given below as called from the interaction the researcher had with her in the field. The widow for fear of further harassment pleaded anonymity. The story happened in 2018 and is about a man who married the woman in question from Ochichi a village in Apa Local Government Area of Benue State twenty years earlier (1998) who took his wife to Lagos where he worked with a reputable company. The wife was so enterprising as a trader and contributed immensely to the building of their house in Lagos and a family house in the village. Their marriage was blessed with four children – two boys and two girls. They also had two cars. In March 2018 the man while going to office one morning had a car crash and died. After the man's burial the woman was made to stay in the village for three months while mourning her husband, after which she requested to go back to Lagos to continue with her work but the husband's relatives refused and even accused her of being responsible for the death of their son so that she could inherit the properties. They instead made arrangement and went to Lagos and carted away all their properties, sold the house in Lagos and left the woman with nothing. As if this wasn't enough. They chased her out of the village family house which she also contributed in the construction. She and her children wept bitterly to no avail. The agony was so much that the elder daughter who was sixteen (16) years then lamented; "if this is what marriage is all about, then I am not going to marry". The irony of this whole saga was that, the female relatives of the deceased man were more violent and vicious in denying this widow inheritance and more vociferous in chasing her out of the family house.

This story as devastating as it is, is reminiscent of the fates of many widows and orphans among Idoma people. The devastating effects this culture has on the widows and orphans include poverty, low self-esteem, despair and inability of the orphans to acquire decent education. The widows are sometimes compelled to do menial jobs and even prostitute in order to make ends meet. The aftermath of prostitution is infections, including that of HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis B and other venereal diseases which increase the level of morbidity and mortality among the widows. The orphans are usually sent on the streets to hawk wares and the females among them can be sexually abused and even take to prostitution later in life. The male children can take to vices such as drug abuse and getting recruited into secret cults and can even become armed robbers later in life. The burden on the widow becomes more excruciating if any of the children has any form of disability, such as blindness or physical deformity, as training of these special children is quite expensive, and so may constitute themselves into miscreants by becoming beggars on the street.

In an interaction with Onah Adeyi, the Secretary General National Albinism

Association of Nigeria who works with National Population Commission Makurdi, he contended that subjecting orphans with albinism to do menial jobs under the sun will predispose them to developing skin cancer due to the ultra violet rays and therefore frowns at the practice. The above submission by the researcher is corroborated by Anyebe E. *et al* in their work titled “A survey of the impact of HIV/AIDS, prevalence, morbidity and mortality pattern on orphan and vulnerable children among the Idoma speaking people of Benue State of Central Nigeria” which revealed that HIV/AIDS morbidity and mortality rates were higher among orphans and vulnerable children compared to other children of better opportunities, as the orphans go through difficult conditions which push them to engage themselves in odd jobs such as street trading, hawking that subject them to sexual abuse, especially the female children (2012)

Apart from the state of penury the widows and orphans are subjected to as a result of disinheritance, the demise of the husband and father alone coupled with the neglect and abandonment by relatives is enough trauma which can lead to poverty of spirit. Ajiki P. corroborates this view when he states that: “A child needs not to be economically poor to be impoverished in America today. A poverty of spirit touches every child, at whatever income level, who does not receive the time, attention and guidance he or she needs and wants from parents and other caring adults” (14).

In many societies in Nigeria and indeed among the Idoma people of Benue State orphans experience both spiritual poverty and economic poverty. The long period of mourning their widow mothers undergo definitely prevent them from engaging in any economic activity, coupled with eventual denial of inheritance rights, with neither moral nor financial support create a fertile ground for economic and spiritual poverty in the lives of both the widows and the orphans. Olapegba P.O. and Chovwen C.O. agree with the above submission as they state that “a widow that is confined, dethroned and disinherited may not see any support around her and these can erode the dignity and self-esteem of the widows and their children (orphans) (831).

The researcher inquired from the widow whose case was highlighted above why she did not seek redress in a court of competent jurisdiction, she grinned and said that taking that action would give credence to the husband’s relatives accusation that she killed her husband in order to inherit the properties, and secondly that she didn’t even have money for any litigation. On the premise of the second excuse the researcher asked whether she was aware of the legal Aid council, but the widow was not enthusiastic and preferred to let the sleeping dog lie. The researcher views this widow’s action as an imbibitions of culture of acquiescence, even though she was not happy. The action by the husband’s relatives is a clear negation of the ethical principle of utilitarianism, since a greater number of widows if not all are never happy being denied inheritance rights of this nature, as the principle of utility states: “an action is right in so far as it tends to produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number” which means the essence of utilitarianism as a philosophy is its stress on the effects which an action has. If an action produces an excess of beneficial effects over harmful ones, then it is right otherwise it is not. Richarch H & Avrum S. (pg 38).

#### **4. EFFECTS ON OTHER WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN**

At a glance one may not appreciate the effects of widowhood practice on other women and their children, since they are not widows and orphans. A careful analysis will however reveal to a very high degree of probability that every married woman is a potential widow and every child is a potential orphan and is only a matter of time for them to experience what widows and orphans go through especially considering the communal nature of Idoma traditional society and their system of socialization. Perhaps it is in this vein that Jenkkins W.J. opined as earlier mentioned in this study that no one is an Island, even islands feed and

they appear to be fed by the waters which surround them. Nwala T.U. in Amucheazi is of the same view with Jenkins as he states that “one thing that happens in a particular family has a tendency of being transmitted to another family in a communal setting. He supports this assertion with an Igbo proverb thus; “*Otu mkpisi aka ruta manu, ozue hadum onu*” meaning when one finger touches oil, it affects the rest of the fingers (298).

The researcher is of the view that apart from the eventual dooms day of becoming widows and orphans (if the wife does not die before her husband and the child does not die before his or her father) the experiences of widows and orphans they see around them instill fear and anxiety in them which may lead to psychological trauma.

## **5 EFFECTS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FAMILIES OF THE SPOUSES**

In the case study of the widow which was highlighted earlier in section 3 of this paper the widow stated that, the female relatives of her late husband were even more vocal and ferocious in chasing her out of her matrimonial home. That act was quite ironical as they too will marry and the same fate could befall them, in other words they seem to be oblivious of the laws of reciprocal action. Isaac Newton a famous English scientist and Philosopher who lived between (1643-1727AD) in his work came out with three laws of motion which scientists and philosophers have applied over the years to solve problems. His third (3<sup>rd</sup>) law of motion which is relevant in this study states that “for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction” (<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com>) this law is quite instructive as it acts as a reminder that for every action man takes he should expect a boomerange. The culture of denying women inheritance as practised by many Idoma people has generated a lot of furore and ado in many families of the spouses and has created antagonism and much animosity between them. The reasons for this rancor are not farfetched, as the family whose daughter is denied inheritance and chased out of her husband home feels humiliated seeing their daughter whom they gave out willingly in marriage and has spent the youthful and useful part of her life in her husband’s home being treated in such a dehumanizing manner. The irony of this issue which is also baffling to the researcher is how a family which is angry as their daughter undergoes this obnoxious cultural practice will mete out the similar action to their daughter-in-law all in the name of culture. The researcher in her interaction with Ngbede Okojokwu a nonagenarian from Olete- Iga in Apa Local Government Area, he lamented this double standard of cultural practice and called for its abolition by the Idoma elders who are the custodians of the culture. He urged the younger generation not to practice it so as not to become victims of Idoma axiom which states that (*Ochoche ako chochi*) connoting that when a weight is on somebody else you will think it is on a wood, but when it falls on you, you will feel it. The researcher is of the same view with the advice of the nonagenarian as no culture is static but dynamic and is subject to changes in line with progression in civilization. The die-hard of this culture of denying women inheritance should change their mind as perpetuating this, creates a vicious cycle of vengeance and animosity between families of spouses that usually results to situations of “pot calling kettle black”.

## **6 SYNTHESIS OF THESE EFFECTS ON IDOMA SOCIETY**

The culture of denying women inheritance rights being practised by Idoma people has far reaching adverse effects on the Idoma society. The various maltreatments widows and orphans go through have cascading effects on other families as highlighted above with resultant colossal effect on the Idoma society, since a society is a conglomeration of various families. Differential levels of educational attainment morbidity and mortality, insecurity, disunity, depopulation, etc. are some of the aftermath of these effects on Idoma society.

## 7 GENDER PARITY AND ETHICAL DISPOSITION TO WOMEN'S INHERITANCE

A careful analysis of the story of creation in the bible reveals that, man and woman were created on equal pedestal even though man was created first. God saw that man was lonesome and decided to create a woman for him to play complimentary roles in his life as a companion. God therefore said "it is not good that the man should be alone, I will make for him a suitable helper" (Genesis 2:18) God views this union so important to the extent that He gave an instruction that, a man will leave his father and mother and will cleave to his wife, they will be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24) in the New Testament Jesus affirmed this teaching when the Pharisees came to test Him on issues regarding divorce. He responded by referring them to the story of creation in Genesis and the purpose of God for creating them male and female, and the establishment of union between the man and woman thus:

Have you not read that He who created them in the beginning made them male and female. And He said for this cause a man will leave his father and mother and will cleave to his wife. And the two will become one flesh? Therefore they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate (Matthew 19:4-6).

Paul in his teachings on marriage also emphasizes on this issue of oneness between husband and wife, when he says "husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord does the church" (Ephesians 5: 28-29). The researcher views these biblical expositions above as equality between man and woman in all ramifications. Husbands and wives being one flesh depicts that everything they have belongs to both of them since they are one, to the extent that in the event of death, the surviving partner in the union should naturally inherit everything accruable to the union. This view is corroborated by Retiet F. thus;

Marriage union presupposes a relationship which cements and expresses a oneness which operates on a far wider level than the physical, covering the joint lives of a man and his wife. This oneness also covers material possessions. Therefore, the property of a married couple should not be separated for any reason. Hence they have full rights to inherit each other's properties if one dies without a will (85).

The various cultural practices that are prevalent in many African societies including that of Idoma where women especially widows are denied inheritance rights are therefore an aberration that is antagonistic to God's original purpose of creation with respect to the relationship between man and woman which is predicated on oneness and equality. Oke F. in Akintude succinctly corroborates this view thus:

The various traditional practices widows are subjected to in the name of culture are no doubt very alarming and worrisome. The need for a change in African customs militating against widows must be seen in the context of the principle that equality means equality of opportunities of right and responsibilities for humanity, for the good of the society as a whole (50).

## 8. RECOMMENDATION

- i. The issue of male hegemony and female gender subjugation should be eradicated.
- ii. All practices against women should be rejected.
- iii. The Och’Idoma should organize seminar on equity and equality of gender.
- iv. Those found guilty should be punished.
- v. The culture should be renewed to accommodate gender equality.

## 9. CONCLUSION

From the field experience, the researcher discovered that many women especially widows were still being subjected to the age long cultural practice of treating the female gender as second class citizens. Many widows were still subjected to inhumane widowhood practices including denying them rights to inherit properties of their late husbands, even though some of them contributed in their acquisition. The experience was however a mixed fortune as some widows confessed to the researcher that they were given all the rights and privileges accruable to them as human beings without any interference. This is commendable and there seems to be light at the end of the tunnel, especially if the above recommendations are carried out. Some clan heads and chiefs confirmed in the researcher that they were already working in their domains to bring a paradigm shift from the status-quo-ante, and vowed to exterminate all the harmful cultural practices which they confessed were obsolete and archaic. Creating an equitable society for all will actually engender fair competition and development to Idoma land.

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**ORAL INTERVIEWEES**

| S/n | Name                      | Gender/<br>Sex | Age | Status   | Location               | Date       |
|-----|---------------------------|----------------|-----|--|------------------------|------------|
| 1   | Abu Achigili              | Male           | 80  | Rtd Civil Servant  | Ugbobi LGA             | 7/09/2021  |
| 2   | Antenyi, J.F.             | Male           | 70  | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Class Chief  | Ugbokpo LGA            | 7/09/2021  |
| 3   | Ahonya Eka                | Female         | 68  | Widow  | Ugboju                 | 9/09/2021  |
| 4   | Eche Ukwu                 | Male           | 80  | Rtd Police Officer   | Ugboju Otukpo<br>LGA   | 9/09/2021  |
| 5   | Onoja Itodo               | Male           | 78  | Rtd Police Officer   | Orokam Ogbadibo<br>LGA | 12/08/2021 |
| 6   | Oyichoma<br>Adanu         | Male           | 75  | Rtd W.O. 2 Officer   | Ogwule Agatu<br>LGA    | 8/09/2021  |
| 7   | Paulina Akpa              | Female         |     | Lecturer   | Ogbadibo               | 23/11/2021 |
| 8   | Ladi Orji                 | Female         | 52  | Principal Women<br>Development<br>Officer                            | Apa                    | 11/11/2021 |
| 9   | Aladi Achigili            | Female         | 74  | Widow  | Apa                    | 11/11/2021 |
| 10  | Elejo Elijah              | Female         | 62  | Widow  | Apa                    | 11/11/2021 |
| 11  | Samson Onyag              | Female         | 50  | Social Welfare<br>Officer  | Apa                    | 11/11/2021 |
| 12  | Gabriel Ogaga             | Male           | 66  | Rtd Civil Servant  | Utonkon Ado<br>LGA     | 10/10/2021 |
| 13  | Echeipu Ado               | Male           | 63  | Rtd Police Officer   | Makurdi                | 11/11/2021 |
| 14  | Chief<br>Emmanuel<br>Odeh | Male           | 60  | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Class Chief  | Ogbadibo               | 11/10/2021 |
| 15  | Onyeche Audu              | Female         | 45  | Widow  | Auke Apa LGA           | 20/09/2021 |
| 16  | Martha Akoje              | Female         | 50  | Civil Servant  | Apa LGA                | 10/09/2021 |
| 17  | Ngbede<br>Okojokwu        | Male           | 90  | Farmer   | Apa LGA                | 10/09/2021 |
| 18  | Akor Udala                | Male           | 63  | Rtd Civil Servant  | Otukpo LGA             | 11/11/2021 |
| 19  | Francis Audu              | Male           | 65  | Rtd Civil Servant  | Ogbadibo LGA           | 10/10/2021 |
| 20  | Veronica Ukah             | Female         | 50  | Principal Woman<br>Development<br>Officer                            | Ogbadibo LGA           | 10/10/2021 |
| 21  | Onoja Rhoda<br>E.         | Female         | 47  | Social Welfare<br>Officer  | Ogbadibo LGA           | 10/10/2021 |
| 22  | Joy Onazi                 | Female         | 45  | Principal Women<br>Development<br>Officer                            | Ado LGA                | 11/11/2021 |
| 23  | Onah Adeyi                | Male           | 52  | Secretary General<br>National Albinism<br>Association of<br>Nigeria. | Ogbadibo LGA           | 11/11/2021 |