

Influence of Harmful Widowhood Practices on Widows in Nigeria: Implications for Guidance

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Abstract

The study investigated the influence of harmful widowhood practices on widows in Nigeria: implications for Guidance. The study was guided by it three specific objectives, three research questions and three null hypotheses. The research design for this study was a descriptive survey research design. The population of this study comprised of all widows in. A sample size of three hundred and twenty-one (321) respondents was sampled for the study. The instrument was a self-designed questionnaire titled "Harmful Widowhood Practices Questionnaire (HWPO). Frequency counts and percentages was used to analyse the demographic data while Mean scores and Standard Deviations was used to answer the research questions also ANOVA was used to test hypotheses 1-2 while t-test was used to test hypotheses 3. The study revealed that poverty, unemployment, lack of education amongst others were some of the factors responsible for harmful widowhood practices in Nigeria, depression, financial instability, emotional instability amongst others were some of the major influence of harmful widowhood practices in Nigeria. It was therefore recommended amongst others that: information and sensitization should be created on the influence of harmful widowhood practices on widows and national development in order to bring the menace to the barest minimum if not totally eradicated.

Key words: Harmful, Widowhood, Practices, Widow and Guidance

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Introduction

Widowhood is a situation that occurs when spouse suffer the loss of their partner, this period is marred with loneliness, economic hardship and social disruptions, more so widows are exposed to certain harmful cultural practices which leads to physical and psychological humiliation. More so, most widows in Nigeria are made to go through tortures as a result of the cultural predicament they meant to go through. Furthermore, Widows who are childless face great calamities that could affect them psychologically. This indicates that a widow who doesn't have a child has no place in her husband's house.

In Nigeria, like any other African Country, traditional practices like the issue of widowhood are still consciously and unconsciously upheld by significant proportion of the population. Widowhood is a tragedy that befalls a married person as a result of the timely or untimely death of the spouse, either the husband or the wife, thereby making the survival a widow or a widower a difficult one. Widowhood practices are observed by almost all the ethnic groups in Nigeria, particularly among the Yoruba, Igbo and Hausas. The culture of widowhood has been in existence from time immemorial and transmitted from generation to generation. The issue of widowhood, particularly in Nigeria, appears to have gender implication as there are certain cultural imbalances in the practices of widowhood by widows and widowers (Chukwu- Okoronkwo, 2016).

Traditions are particularly hard on widows because widowhood involves varying degrees of physical hardship, deprivation, ritual contaminations; the travail of a widow begins as soon as the death of her husband is announced. The in-laws immediately demand for the list of the man's property and bank accounts, after which she is subjected to series of rites and ritual practices to mourn the death of her husband (Chukwu-Okoronkwo & Nwankwo, 2012). However, this involves torturing and dehumanizing of the widow and making her to undergo series of rituals. Okoye as cited in Adeyemo (2014) summated that a widow is made to feel miserable, wretched and guilty over death of her husband. Oloko cited in George (2013) also reported that in different parts of the country, widowhood is associated with rituals and taboos, which are degrading and inhuman. Part of the ritual include the initial seven days confinement in a particular room, though where people could have access to her, putting on black or dark cloths and in most cases, having her hairs shaved. The proper mourning could last for three months initially, while the duration of wearing dark clothes ranges from three months to one year, depending on culture, religion and family position on the matter.

Laolu cited in Adeyemo (2014) confirms that a widow goes into confinement for seven days in which she is not allowed to go out, or take her bath or change her clothes, she is expected to sit on bare floor or a mat at best, only few influential and educated widows are given preferential treatment, widows according him subject to the kind of relationship existing between the widow and her in-laws. Thus, widowhood has not been a pleasant experience, but nature has made it a necessary lifestyle, consequence upon the death of the husband. On further clarification, Fasonranti (2016) reported that in some Yoruba communities, a widow is expected to eat from broken plates and cook with broken pots, and on the seventh day, her hair is shaved to sever the bond between her and the dead husband. She is also expected to keep vigils and appears very sorrowful by wailing and crying profusely. If she fails to mourn, it is believed that she may become mentally deranged or forfeit the right to any benefit. After this, she goes into mourning proper, which could be for a period of three or four months, during which she is to be

of impeccable behaviour so that her late husband's spirit may gain quick entry into the community of his ancestral spirit.

At the end of three or four months, a widow will perform the outing ceremony, which include being washed in the night after having the final wailing, making some rituals which are expected to finally put the spirit of the departed soul to final rest and performs the "outing" rites which involves changing of dresses and being led to the market. The outing rites also involve the widow going into elaborate parties which mark the outing. With this a widow will have to spend all she had left in shouldering the responsibilities of the ceremony. The widow then steps into the shoes of a provider, becoming the breadwinners of their family (Awoh, 2004). On the inheritance right, the deceased husband's property is shared among his children. But if the family is a polygamous one, the property is shared among the number of wives he had, (Olaniyi, 2010). If on the other hand, the man left a will, his property will be shared in accordance with his will. Widow in Yoruba Land does not have rights to inherit the husband's property, instead the relatives of decease decide what happen the property.

Olanisebe (2016) considers women as part of the estate of their husband who is to be inherited by relatives of the husband. This brings in the issue of leverage in which a widow is handed over in marriage to her deceased younger brother, particularly if the widow is still young. An older brother, by custom, is never allowed the right of levitation of the demise of a younger brother. A widow who refused to cooperate with the family on this ground may be disowned together with her children and left alone to fend for themselves. It does not matter whether the union is blessed with children or not, a widow in Yoruba land is expected to go through these rites upon the death of her husband.

Olaniyi (2010) provides overwhelming evidences on widowhood practices in Igbo culture of the South-Eastern part of Nigeria and the violence perpetuated against widows from relatives and family members. There, widows are kept in dark rooms for days and are sometimes deprived of access to food, they are forced to weep daily, sleeping on mats or old banana leaves, eating from broken pots, forced to drink the water used in bathing their husbands' corpse, they are compelled to mourn the husband with black clothes and also expected to allow the married daughter of the community to shave the hair on their head and pubic with razor blades, to prove their innocence in relation to their husband's death.

Olanisebe (2016) observed that widows in this part of the country have to undergo certain traditional rites and practices which forms part of the deceased husband's funeral ceremony in other to show respect to the dead husband. Also, in the northern part of Nigeria the Birom in Plateau State, when a husband dies, he is buried within one week, the widow observes the Takaba, a four-month, ten-day mourning period in seclusion talking to no one and sitting in a place. She wears a sack and has a grass frond round her head, the sack or simple tarred clothe forms all the dressing of the widow. She remains in the house mourning until the male members of the family take a decision as to who will remarry the widow (Okoye cited in Olanisebe, 2016).

Adeyemo (2016) observed that widowers across Nigeria rarely go through these ordeals at the demise of their wives. From observations, they are not subjected to indignities when their wives die, they are not compelled to mourn, nor subjected to any of the dehumanizing experiences which widows go through. During the mourning periods, widower sleeps where

ever he wants, though may be confined to a particular place, but they are allowed free movement within the house, they are not restricted from visiting certain places (Awoh, 2004). After the mourning period, they simply change the colour of their dress which they used for mourning their wives, whereas, it is a taboo seeing a widow during mourning period in any social gathering, cleansing must take place before she can re-unite with members of the family. Concerning the funeral ceremony, if such a man has a daughter that is married, instead of the man providing money for the wife's funeral, the in-laws are asked to do so. A widower in every culture is also free to remarry as soon as Possible unlike the widow. It has been observed that some men even go to the extent of having standby woman they marry shortly after the mourning period.

It has been observed by the researchers that the harmful widowhood practices affect the moral development of their children, in the areas feeding, shelter and payment of school fees and often leads to maladaptive behaviours among their children. This shows that widows suffer lots of lack at the death of their husband. According to Agunwa, observed that widowhood rites often make women to be dethroned, defaced, disentangled, defiled, denied, deprived, dispossessed and disinherited The enormous discrimination and humiliating treatments that widows frequently encounter, in varying degrees of hardships, is a threat to the rights of women (widows) and the their quest to survive as individuals as well as bringing up their children as recognized in international human rights conventions and treaties and in national legislation.

In-spites of various laws protecting women rights and other harmful practices against women as well as religious practices and belief, these harmful cultural practices against women have continued unabated thereby compounding the problems of the widows and subjecting them to ridicule. The researcher's wonders why the death of the beloved spouse should bring humiliation and deprivation instead of attracting sympathy and support from other people. The observation of the researcher's, is that widows find it difficult to adjust to the new life or situation in which they find themselves, which make some of these widows die soon after the death of their husband, some fall sick from drinking the water used in bathing the remains of their husband body. While some are traumatized and depressed as a result of inhuman treatment melted on them as a result of their husband demise. Should this evil cultural practice continue? The answer is capital NO; as this not only affects the widow but also affects the children who are the future of every nation. It is against this background that prompted the researchers to embark on this study (the influence of harmful widowhood practices on widows in Nigeria: Implications for Guidance.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of harmful widowhood practices on widows in Nigeria: Implications for Guidance. The specific objectives are to:

- i. investigate the factors responsible for harmful widowhood practices against widow in Nigeria.
- ii. find out the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows in Nigeria.
- iii. identify the counselling strategies to address harmful widowhood practices in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the conduct of this study:

1. What are the factors responsible for harmful widowhood practices against widow in Nigeria?
2. What is the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows in Nigeria?
3. What are the counselling strategies to address harmful widowhood practices in Nigeria?

Null Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- H₀₁:** There is no significant difference between the mean score of widows as regards to the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows in Nigeria based on educational qualification.
- H₀₂:** There is no significant difference between the mean score of widows as regards to the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows in Nigeria based on socio-economic status.
- H₀₃:** There is no significant difference between the mean score of widows as regards to the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows in Nigeria based on location.

Basic Assumptions

The basic assumption of this study are as follows;

1. That the factors responsible for the harmful widowhood practices in Nigeria could be ascertained.
2. That the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widow could be investigated.
3. That the counselling strategies to address the harmful widowhood practices in Nigeria could be determined

Conceptual Framework

This section explains, define, explain and discuss, the concepts used in the study

Widow

A widow is a woman whose husband is dead and has not re-married. While a woman is an adult female human being. It then follows that a widow is an adult female human being who lost the spouse to the cold hands of death and has not re-married. The widow bears the responsibilities and challenges of the immediate family which was formerly borne by herself and the husband, all alone. Widowhood entails the observance of certain rites by the woman. These rites and practices differ from culture to culture in Nigeria. (Agunwa, 2011). Even among the Igbos of the South East

under discussion, there are slight observable differences. Hence the death of a male spouse heralds varying archaic, anachronistic and obnoxious practices in the name of culture.

The widowhood rituals are immoral traditional practices, which include mourning rituals and food taboos that are enforced on widows, and which inevitably expose them to economic hardship, confinement and ill treatment (Anugwom cited in Afolaya, 2011). These rituals are enforced on widows because of the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian Society, particularly the Igbos of the South East. Women are regarded as their husband's property or chattels. They are compelled by cultural practices to be and remain subservient to their husbands. The subservient nature of women during their husband's lifetime are carried into the death of their husbands and thereafter.

The widowhood rites and practices are found in many parts of Nigeria, including Gombe, Anambra, Imo, Abia, Enugu and Ebonyi States. These practices are dehumanizing, degrading, barbaric obnoxious, anachronistic and grossly immoral. The death of a woman's husband heralds grave suffering, maltreatment and violation of her human rights by cultural agents of the community, including her spouse's family. The woman is expected to wail and cry loudly at her husband's death, and show deep sense of grief. In some cultures, the woman is forced to cry aloud morning and night. But men are not to cry in the public or show outward grief as expected from women. The widow is the first suspect at the demise of her husband. Hence (Afolaya, 2011) posits that hardly does an Igbo man die for nothing, and usually the wife is the 1st suspect. So, where she is accused of having a hand in his death, she may have to prove her innocence by drinking the water with which the corpse was washed, eating kolanut offered by the elders or the high priest.

Factors Responsible for Harmful Widowhood Practices in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the travail of a widow begins as soon as the death of her husband is announced. The in-laws immediately demand for the list of the man's property and bank accounts, after which she is subjected to series of rites and ritual practices to mourn the death of her husband. This involves torturing and dehumanizing the widow and making her to undergo series of rituals. Okoye as cited in Uche (2015) summated that a widow is made to feel miserable, wretched and guilty over her loss. She is seen and treated as ill-luck goat to be avoided so that she does not infect other women. Oloko as cited in Uche (2015) also reported that in different parts of the country, widowhood is associated with ritual sand taboos, which are degrading and inhuman.

According to Olaniyi (2010) they provide overwhelming evidences on widowhood practices in Igbo culture of the South-Eastern part of Nigeria and the violence perpetuated against widows from relatives and family members. There, widows are kept in dark rooms for days and are sometimes deprived of access to food, they are forced to weep daily, sleeping on mats or old banana leaves, eating from broken pots, forced to drink the water used in bathing their husbands' corpse, they are compelled to mourn the husband with black clothes and also expected to allow the married daughter of the community to shave the hair on their head and pubic with razor blades, to prove their innocence in relation to their husband's death. Widows in this part of the country have to undergo certain traditional rites and practices which forms part of the deceased husband's funeral ceremony in other to show respect to the dead husband.

However, Male-Dominance remains one of the major factors influencing widowhood practices in this part of the country. Maleness is usually associated with superiority, an attribute men ascribe to themselves as divine right and as a fact of natural selection (Okoye, 2010). Right

from the time of creation, when the first human, Adam was created, and Eve was created as a companion for him out of his ribs, women have been treated as inferior sex. They are regarded and treated women as second-class citizens, for instance, in the religious circle, the men hold firmly to the biblical details of the story of creation that woman was taken from the side of the man; therefore, the man stands out to be the real creature (Ahonsi, 2016). The man also determines the woman's personal physical, psychological and even emotional needs. The bible recorded that "a woman desired shall be to her husband, and he shall rule over her" Gen. 3:16 b. Therefore, the man is given ample opportunities to acquire leadership qualities while the traditional role ascribed to women was to be the housewives and general helpers to their husbands.

Illiteracy status of majority of widows is also a significant factor responsible for the unhealthy widowhood practices in Northeastern Nigeria. In the time past, formal education for girls has been secondary to that of the boys. Women have been considered intellectual inferior to men. This is seen in the belief then that it is unwise to invest in the education of the female child because "the natural place of a woman is in the kitchen" (Okoye, 2010). This severe but general discrimination and neglect of the female child's education hinders their progress and expose them to all forms of abuses and un healthy cultural practices like the strict observance of widowhood rites. This has affected and still affecting women till date. Illiteracy status of women has really contributed to the plight of widows. The illiterate widows are particularly disadvantaged as illiteracy has rendered them socially and economically venerable.

Olumukoro (2011) confirms that women's illiteracy position perpetuates poor health, inadequate diet, early entering into motherhood, frequent pregnancies and continued cycle of poverty. Okonkwo (2011) further pointed out that illiteracy of widows in this part of the country has put them at disadvantaged position. According to him, it is illiteracy that would make a widow to be stripped naked and forced to lie with her husband's corpse in a final embrace as a mark of severing all sexual relationship with the dead man and with the belief that this love-making between the widow and her dead husband will soothe the spirit of the dead man. Studies have also shown that widowhood rites and practices, meted on widows who are educated and have a means of livelihood are not the same as those who are less educated and are not economically empowered.

The educated widows are economically empowered and are able to fight for their rights because of their financial capability Emewu (2016). Babalola (2010) also pointed out that women who are in the best position to withstand the pressure to comply with widowhood rites are usually those who are educated and enlightened enough to challenge those trying to impose rites on them or wealthy enough to provide a sum of money in lieu of compliance. Adeyemo (2014) added that the issue of staying in-doors for a long period for mourning rites is more pronounced among illiterate widows than the educated once. While the illiterate widows are compelled to stay indoors for as long as it is required by the family of the deceased, the educated and working-class widows will have to resume work latest three to four weeks after the incident. Evidence in this regard shows that widows who are educated and gainfully employed have sufficient resources to shield and secure themselves from any inhuman and degrading widowhood.

Influence of Harmful Widowhood Practices on Widows in Nigeria

The plights of widows are the same in almost every part of the world. Olanisebe (2015) corroborates the assertion when he says that widowhood all over the world is characterized by grief, bereavement, rituals, forced remarriages, harassment, rejection, loneliness, poverty and

relatively high mortality. However, the situation of widows and widowers largely depends on country, society, religion and economic systems. Thus, the ordeal of widows in Nigeria or any part of most countries of the world is not different from the experience of the widow of one of the sons of the Prophets that has been considered above. For instance, Elliott as cited in Olanisebe (2015) while describing the ordeals of widows in China, is of the opinion that they are economically vulnerable, ritually superfluous, and at the same time socially destabilized and sexually threatened, they were archetypal luminal figures - marginalized, caricatured, and feared. Ewelukwa (2012) in the same vein, has split the experiences of Nigerian widows generally into two broad categories: disinheritance and deprivation of property and the mandatory observance of prescribed burial rituals, which however, varies from one ethnic group to another, from state to state, and most often from one town to another.

The first culturally and ritually defined ordeal is the charge against widows as being their husbands' death by the extended members of the family of the deceased virtually in all cultures in Nigeria. However, this false accusation is not limited to Nigeria for in Taiwan, for instance, many widows come under suspicion from their in-laws or neighbours as the potential cause of their husbands' "bad deaths"; even well-educated Taiwanese women may feel the burden of accusation that without them, their spouses would never have suffered from a bad life that included an early demise. For the rest of their lives, such women will face constant reminders of what traditional Chinese society considers "incompleteness." (Hsu, Kahn and Hsu, cited in Afolaya, 2011). Economically, the widow is made to suffer after her husband's death, especially if she is one who has the mentality of "me and my husband" when the husband was alive and has not been friendly with the members of the extended family of her husband. In cases where the husband's property is forcefully taken from the widow, this leads to the breakdown in the economic power of the widow especially if the widow had been a full-time house wife before her husband's death. The bulk of the financial and material responsibilities which had been shouldered by the husband are automatically transferred to her without any adequate preparation for it.

More so, this becomes rather worse if the widow in question is a "young widow" with small children to cater for Ricketson cited in Nwogu (2015) also corroborates the fact that a young widow faces many problems that cannot even be alleviated if the husband left any property because the fact that the widow is young also indicates that the husband was also young at the point of death and would not have been able to amass or possess much property. The situation is even worse if the husband left debts behind. Childless widows and widows with only female children are in worse situations and oftentimes face expulsion from their matrimonial home on the death of their spouse.

One of the reasons for this economic disempowerment of widows is not unconnected with the inability of many of them to inherit their husbands' property on his demise. The Yoruba culture frowns at this because they believe that the property belongs to the children and the family, and that the wife was also a property to be inherited. The wife would only indirectly benefit from the property that is given to her children. This situation often leads to economic disempowerment of widows, pauperization, impoverishment and marginalization in the society (Olanisebe, 2015). Widowhood presents a myriad of problems such as economic, social and psychological particularly in the first year or so after the death of their spouse. Helena Lopataas cited in Adeyemo (2014) has done extensive research with more than 1000 widows and widowers. A major Problem for both sexes is economic hardship. When the husband was the principal breadwinner, his widow is now deprived of his income and the nucleus of the family is destroyed. The freedom and independence of the nucleus of the family is suddenly lost as a result of the death of the husband. A widowed man on

the other hand, now has to buy many of the services his wife had previously provided. Where both had been employed, the loss of one income is often major (Adeyemo, 2016).

Grief over the loss of a loved one especially one who had played such a central role in one's life for so many years, may affect the widow's health making them to have more physical illness and are frequently admitted to hospitals, thus leading to rise in the death rate. Beilin and Hardt studying 1803 people over 65 years of age in New York, found out that the rate of mental disorder was higher among the widowed than among the still married. These higher rates of mental illness were related not only to widowhood but also to advanced age, physical ill- health and other variables. Blackwell cited in Adeyemo (2014). also found that higher rate of mental illness was found among the widowed than their married. Another of the problem associated with widowhood is loneliness as most widows nearly eight out of ten live by themselves and so they suffer the fear of being alone and loss of self-esteem as women in addition to the many practical problems related to living alone (Luginaah, Elkins, Maticka-Tyndale, Landry & Mathui cited in Adeyemo, 2016). They feel the loss of personal contract and human association therefore they tend to withdraws and become unresponsive. Most are reluctant to move in with their children and only those who are Prior and frail live with some relatives, few express any interest in remarrying and so the luck of potential remarriage partners may not distress them counterparts.

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Further, lack of public concern for the suffering of widows and their children on the part of governments, non-governmental organizations and the society has further compounded the suffering of widows. Public policies have not been sufficiently developed to protect widows' inheritance right as well as well as protecting them against all forms if abuses. Also, the financial assistance from the government, nongovernmental organizations as well as from individual that

could have provided succor for widow's children education was not forthcoming and adequate. (Adeyemo, 2014). Ilemobade as cited in Ushe (2011) observed that lack of widow's supports often forced the young children of most widows, particularly the females among them to drop out of school in order to cater for other siblings, while the males' become truants in the course of fending for themselves or putting bread on the family's table. The above facts therefore depict the characteristics of the socio-economic status of widows in Southwestern Nigeria. It is therefore important that efforts are geared to reduce these problems in order to take care of the children's education and improve the overall welfare of widows. To this end, this study has established that a lot of problems facing widows can be solved if they are gainfully employed. Vocational skills acquisition has therefore been considered in this study as a major economic activity that can guarantee and empower widows to have a better future for themselves and their children. It involves the acquisition of skills, abilities, values, attitude and competencies essential for employment, on the job improvement as well as poverty reduction.

Corroborating this, Aromolaran (2011) have described vocational skills as an aspect of training that gives its recipients an opportunity to acquire practical skills and knowledge needed for entry into the world of work as self-employed. Also, Bhola (2017) sees vocational skills training as that which can liberate women, particularly, widows from unemployment, economic dependency and poverty Supporting this, Akpama and Andong in Awoh (2014) also describe vocational skills acquisition as a tool for economic empowerment that can sustain widows and her children and expose them to all necessary economic opportunities, leading to supportive services that can liberate them. Therefore, widows need to engage themselves in these economic activities to enable them meet the various challenges of widowhood and there is no doubt that vocational skills will empower them to train their children to any level.

Counselling Strategies to Addressed Harmful Widowhood Practices

Widows are bound to experience various dimensions of stress, which invariably constitute stress level in their lives. For example, lack of necessary emotional support and financial assistance at an age when their earning power is gradually on the decline is a source of stress for widows. According to the Iruloh and Elsie in Adeyemo (2014) they identified that psychological problems were the most serious for widows in DankoWasagu local government area of Kebbi state. The results showed that economic problems and social problems have an effect on the adjustment strategies of widows. Based on the findings, it was recommended that widows should be provided with work opportunities to help them establish small enterprises and train them to manage these projects. It was also suggested that higher education should be obtained by widows through counseling services and lastly counselors should try to counsel married men to write their wills and make their wives and children as their next of kin in order to avoid these problems that were found to be faced by widows.

Thus, the development of useful adjustment strategies has been found to be dependent on certain factors like the age of the widow or length of marriage, her religious background or inclination, ethnic group, social-economic status and level of educational attainment among others. Adjustment strategies have been described as an individual's coping strategies, behaviours, which are consciously used by an individual (e.g. widow) to handle or control the effects of anticipated or experienced stressful situations. Adjustment or coping strategies for the management of any kind of stress are quite replete in literature. Some of the strategies include: controlling adrenalin arousal, self-talk, attention diversion strategy, insensitivity technique, relaxation, transcendental meditation,

biofeedback, stress diary, sleeping technique, laughing technique, crying technique, gentle behaviour technique, positive thinking, problem solving strategy, confrontive coping strategy, social support strategy, assertive strategy, prevention strategy, calmness, body exercise, cognitive restructuring strategy, express emotion, wishful thinking, self-criticism, social withdrawal strategy, problem avoidance strategy, faith strategy, group discussion technique, seeking counsellor's help and the host of others

Nevertheless, Lazarus and Folkman cited in Iruloh and Ushe (2011) had earlier stressed that people attend to or cope with their stress in two different dimensions namely; problem focused coping and emotion focused coping. According to Lazarus and Folkman, the problem focused coping is the strategy that is directed towards solving the problem that cause stress while, the emotion focused coping is the strategy that attends to the feelings or emotions of stress rather than the source (stressor) itself. According to Ushe (2011) in his study the Historical studies showed that widowhood in pre-Christian and Islamic periods were a natural phenomenon which carries with the risk of conjugal bereavement due to the death of one spouse. However, the situation changed immediately the society started subjecting widows into various tortures and mistreatments (especially from 1970s), leading to distrust amongst families and eventually violence amongst the people.

Radical Feminist Theory by Ti-Grace Atkinson (1969)

Radical feminist theory was propounded by Ti-Grace Atkinson (1969): he observed that the radical feminism is a perspective within feminism that calls for a radical reordering of society in which male supremacy is eliminated in all social and economic contexts, while recognizing that women's experiences are also affected by other social divisions such as in race, class, and sexual orientation, Radical feminists assert that global society functions as a patriarchy in which the class of men are the oppressors of the class of women. They propose that the oppression of women is the most fundamental form of oppression, one that has existed since the inception of humanity. As radical feminist Ti-Grace Atkinson (1969) wrote in her foundational piece "Radical Feminism" feminist theories first emerged as early as 1794 in publications such as A Vindication of the Rights of Woman by Mary Wollstonecraft, "The Changing Woman", "Ain't a Woman", "Speech after Arrest for Illegal Voting".

Radical feminists argue that, because of patriarchy, women have come to be viewed as the "other" to the male norm, and as such have been systematically oppressed and marginalized. They further assert that men as a class benefit from the systematic oppression of women. Patriarchal theory is not defined by a belief that all men always benefit from the oppression of all women. Rather, it maintains that the primary element of patriarchy is a relationship of dominance, where one party is dominant and exploits the other for the benefit of the former.

Radical feminists believe that men (as a class) use social systems and other methods of control to keep women (as well as non-dominant men) suppressed. Radical feminists seek to abolish patriarchy by challenging existing social norms and institutions, and believe that eliminating patriarchy will liberate everyone from an unjust society. Ti-Grace Atkinson maintained that the need for power fuels the male class to continue oppressing the female class, arguing that "the need men have for the role of oppressor is the source and foundation of all human oppression. However, the widowhood rites and other forms of harmful cultural practices emanated from oppression and subjugation of women by men, the assumptions of the radical theory explain while such practices

continue to exist in the society even in the midst of civilization and globalization. Widow's outcry in different parts of the countries in Africa has a clear indication of men dominance on the women, that has sustained harmful practices over the year.

The Radical feminist theory asserts that women have come to be viewed as the "supplementary" to the male norm, and as such, this has been the reason why women are systematically oppressed and marginalized, the assumptions of the radical feminist theory have been considered adequate in explaining the study because the radical feminist theory vividly explain the exploitation and inequality that exist between the men and women in relation to the marginalization of widowhoods and the harmful cultural practices that seem to reduce women to second class citizen in the society. Therefore, the radical feminist theory was chosen by the researcher because it explains the in-trick that played during the widowhood harmful practices meted on widows.

Research Design

The design adopted for this study is descriptive survey research design. This is a research method that describes a given state of affairs at a particular time (Olayiwola; Afu, Oguche, Usman and Gimba, 2023). This research design permits the gathering of information through the use of questionnaire from a population based on appropriate sampling techniques. Also, descriptive survey research was considered suitable since it would solicit for information or responses from the respondents on the problem under investigation. It was on this basis that the researcher decided to use descriptive survey design.

Population of the Study

The population of this study comprises of all widows in Nigeria. The total of widows in Nigeria is not known as thus, their population is put at infinity.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The sample size for this study is three hundred and twenty-one (321) widows in Nigeria.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in data collection for this study was a self-structured Instrument Harmful Widowhood Practice Questionnaire (HWPQ) constructed by the researcher. The instrument consisted of two sections: A and B. Section A comprised personal data of the respondents while section B consisted of fifteen items on the influence of harmful widowhood practices on widows in Nigeria: implications for guidance. The instrument was designed along the four-point scale format of Strongly Agree (SA - 4), Agree (A - 3), Disagree (D - 2), Strongly Disagree (SD - 1) where the respondents indicated their options on the items of the instrument.

Method of Data Analysis

The collected data was analysed using simple percentages, frequency count, mean score and standard deviations for demographic data and the research questions. The research questions were graded on a score of 2.50. Any item with a mean score of 2.50 and above was considered as "Agree" while those scores below the mean score of 2.50 were considered

“Disagree”. All the hypotheses of this study were tested using ANOVA and t-test. Hypotheses 1-2 were tested using ANOVA while hypothesis 3 were tested using t-test. All the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Data Presentation

The data presented and analyzed were demographic data, answering of research questions and testing of hypotheses. The data presented was based on a sample size of 321.

Analysis of Demographic Data

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Socio-economic Status

Socio-economic Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	68	21.18
Average	137	42.68
Low	116	36.14
Total	321	100.00

Source: (Field Survey, 2024)

Table 1 showed demographic data of the respondent’s socio-economic status. From the analysis, it was discovered that 68 (21.18%) of the respondents were from high socio-economic status, 137 (42.68%) of the respondents were from average socio-economic status (they are not that rich nor poor) while 116 (36.14 %) of the respondents were from low socio-economic status. This implies that the number of respondents from average socio-economic status is more than that of the respondents from high and low parental socio-economic status.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Educational Level

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Tertiary	84	26.17
Secondary	109	33.96
Primary	73	22.74
No formal Education	55	17.13
Total	321	100.00

Source: (Field Survey, 2024)

Table 2 showed demographic data of the respondent’s educational background. From the analysis, it was discovered that 84 (26.17%) of the respondents’ school up to tertiary level. 109 (33.96%) of the respondents’ stop at secondary level of education, 73 (22.74%) of the respondents’ parent stop at primary educational level while 55 (17.13%) of the respondents has no formal education. This implies that the number of respondents education level of secondary school were higher than that of the respondents with tertiary, primary and non-formal education.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by their Location

Location	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Urban	161	50.16
Rural	160	49.84
Total	321	100.00

Source: (Field Survey, 2024)

Table above 3 shows that out of the total number of 321 respondents, 161 representing (50.16%) were from the urban area. The remaining 160 representing (49.84%) were from the rural area. This implies that the number of respondents from urban area exceeded that of the respondents from rural area.

Answers to Research Questions

This section contains data of the research questions raised to guide this study

Research Question One: What are the factors responsible for harmful widowhood practices against widow in Nigeria?

Table 4: Frequency Scores of Respondents opinions on the factors responsible for harmful widowhood practices against widow in Nigeria.

N=321

S/no	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
4.	Poverty	3.39	0.839	Agreed
5.	Lack of education	2.87	0.787	Agreed
6.	Ignorance	3.30	0.834	Agreed
7.	Inferior social status	3.46	0.843	Agreed
8.	Cultural beliefs	3.59	0.855	Agreed
9.	Peer pressure	2.88	0.779	Agreed
10.	Parental influence	1.97	0.681	Disagreed
11.	Unemployment	2.90	0.753	Agreed
12.	Infertility	2.69	0.742	Agreed
13.	Male dominance and patriarchal influence	3.37	0.781	Agreed
Overall Mean		3.04	0.789	Agreed

Table 4 showed the overall mean score of 3.04 on the various factors responsible for harmful widowhood practices against widow in Nigeria. From the analysis, it was discovered that majority of the respondents agreed to all the items in table 4 as some of the factors responsible for harmful widowhood practices against widow in Nigeria. The researcher's concluded that all the items mentioned in table 4 were the major factors responsible for harmful widowhood practices against widow in Nigeria because they all has a mean score above 2.50 except item ten with mean score of 1.97 which was rejected and these is in line with the decision rule that any item with the mean score of 2.50 and above be agreed and below be disagreed.

Research Question Two: What is the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows in Nigeria?

**Table 5: Frequency scores of respondents' opinions on the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows in Nigeria:
 N=321**

S/no	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
14.	Harmful widowhood practices lead to increase likelihood of death.	2.74	0.762	Agreed
15.	Harmful widowhood practices lead to depression.	2.96	0.753	Agreed
16.	Harmful widowhood practices lead to substance abuse.	3.06	0.785	Agreed
17.	Harmful widowhood practices lead to socio-economic and psychological trauma.	2.98	0.788	Agreed
18.	Harmful widowhood practices lead to emotional instability.	2.93	0.781	Agreed
19.	Harmful widowhood practices lead to stigmatization among peers and family members.	3.16	0.818	Agreed
20.	Harmful widowhood practices lead to perpetual hardship.	2.83	0.768	Agreed
21.	Harmful widowhood practices lead to children dropping out of school due to financial constraints.	2.93	0.769	Agreed
22.	Harmful widowhood practices lead to low self-esteem.	2.68	0.748	Agreed
23.	Harmful widowhood practices lead to gender inequality.	2.80	0.765	Agreed
Overall Mean		2.91	0.774	Agreed

Table 5 showed the overall mean score of 2.91 on the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows in Nigeria. From the analysis it was discovered that all the items mentioned in table 5 were given favourable responses as none of the mean score were below 2.50. It was therefore concluded that, all the items mentioned in table 6 were some of the influences of influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows in Nigeria and this is in line with the decision rule that any item with the mean score 2.50 and above be disagreed and below be disagreed.

Research Question Three: What are the counselling strategies to address harmful widowhood practices in Nigeria?

Table 6: Frequency scores of respondents' opinions on the counselling strategies to address harmful widowhood practices in Nigeria.

N=321

S/no	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
26.	Provision of jobs opportunities for widows	3.16	0.80	Agreed
27.	Provision of information and sensitization on consequence harmful widowhood practices on widows	3.28	0.83	Agreed
28.	Adequate provision of counselling should be made available for widow	2.68	0.66	Agreed
29.	Wills should be writing and obeyed.	3.44	0.71	Agreed
30.	Government at all level should enact laws to eradicate all forms of harmful widowhood practices	3.10	0.52	Agreed
Overall Mean		3.13	0.70	Agreed

Table 6 shows the overall mean score of 3.13 on the counselling strategies to address harmful widowhood practices in Nigeria. From the analysis it was discovered that, over average of the respondents agreed to all the statements in table 7 as some of the counselling strategies to address harmful widowhood practices in Nigeria. It was concluded that, all the above mentioned in table 7 were some of the major counselling strategies to address harmful widowhood practices in Nigeria and these is in line with the decision rule that any item with the mean score of 2.50 and above be agreed and below be disagreed.

Hypotheses Testing

The following Null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the mean score of widows as regards to the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows in Nigeria based on educational qualification.

Table 7: One-way ANOVA on the difference between the mean score of widows as regards to the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows:

Variables	N	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.(P)	Decision
Between Groups	.194	2	0.97	1.296	0.023	Significant
Within Groups	9.13	319	0.75			
Total	9.197	321				

*=significant at 0.05 level (p<0.05)

The analysis on table 7 was carried out to determine whether there is any significant difference in the mean score of widows as regards to the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows in Nigeria based on educational qualification. A significant value of 0.023 was recorded (less than the 0.05 level of

significance). This shows that there was a significant difference. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis which stated that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of widows as regards to the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows in Nigeria based on educational qualification which is in line with the decision rule that, 0.05 and above be accepted and below be rejected. This implies that there is a significant difference between the mean score of widows as regards to the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows in Nigeria based on educational qualification.

Ho2: There is no significant difference between the mean score of widows as regards to the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows in Nigeria based on socio-economic status.

Table 8: One-way ANOVA on the difference between the mean score of widows as regards to the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows:

Variables	N	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.(P)	Decision
Between Groups	2.123	3	0.87	0.342	0.042	Significant
Within Groups	6.63	318	0.611			
Total	8.174	321				

***=significant at 0.05 level (p<0.05)**

The analysis on table 8 was carried out to determine whether there is any significant difference in the mean score of widows as regards to the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows in Nigeria based on socio-economic status. A significant value of 0.042 was recorded (less than the 0.05 level of significance). This shows that there was a significant difference. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis which stated that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of widows as regards to the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows in Nigeria based on socio-economic status which is in line with the decision rule that, 0.05 and above be accepted and below be rejected. This implies that there is a significant difference between the mean score of widows as regards to the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows in Nigeria socio-economic status.

H03: There is no significant difference between the mean score of rural and urban widows as regards to the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows in Nigeria.

Table 9: t-test results of the significant difference in the mean ratings of rural and urban widows on the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows in Nigeria.

Variables	N	X	SD	df	t-value	Sig.(P)	Decision
Rural	160	290	0.772	319	1.323	.013	Significant
Urban	161	292	0.776				

*=significant at 0.05 level (p<0.05)

The analysis on Table 9 was carried out to determine whether there is any significant difference in the mean ratings of rural and urban widows as regards to influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows in Nigeria. A significant value of .013 (less than the 0.05 level of significance) was recorded. This shows that there was a significant difference. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. This implies that there is a significance difference in the mean ratings of rural and urban widow regarding the influence of harmful widowhood practices against widows in Nigeria.

Major Findings

The study revealed that:

1. Poverty, unemployment, ignorance, lack of education among others were some of the factors responsible for harmful widowhood practices in Nigeria.
2. Depression, psychological trauma, school dropout, financial instability, stigmatization, low self-esteem, emotional instability amongst others were some of the influence of harmful widowhood practices among widows in Nigeria.
3. Creation of awareness and sensitization on the influence of harmful widowhood practices, provision of jobs opportunities for widow, gender equality be encouraged, provision of counselling for widows amongst others are the possible solution to harmful widowhood practices in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The study concluded that harmful widowhood practices in Nigeria are due to gender inequality, ignorance, greed, lack of education amongst others. The study also concluded that there is a significant difference in the means scores of widows from rural and urban areas in Nigeria as rural areas are more affected than their urban counterpart due to access to mass media, counsellors, enlightenments amongst others. The study further concluded that widows differ significantly education wise as those without formal education are more affected than those with formal education. The study equally concluded that widows from high and average socio-economic status suffer less harmful widowhood practices than their counterpart from poor socio-economic status.

Widowers across Nigeria rarely go through these ordeals at the demise of their wives. From observations, they are not subjected to indignities when their wives die, they are not compelled to mourn, nor subjected to any of the dehumanizing experiences which widows go through. During the mourning periods, widower sleeps where ever he wants, though may be confined to a particular place, but they are allowed free movement within the house, they are not restricted from visiting certain places. This should also be applicable to widows.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on results of findings:

1. More efforts should be made to create information and sensitization on the various factors responsible for harmful widowhood practices so as to eradicate or bring to the barest minimum the menace of cultural harmful widowhood practices especially in the area of the rural areas.
2. The Government should make provision of counselling unit centre for widows that are victims of harmful widowhood practices in order to reduce the physical and psychological trauma and the negative influence it has on widows' general wellbeing.
3. Government at all levels and other stakeholders in education should create more workshops for widows on the responsible for harmful widowhood practices in order to prevent the re-occurrence of this menace in Nigeria and also to address the influence on widows and national development.

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