

Widowhood and Harmful Traditional Practices against Women in South East Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

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| Abstract | <i>Journal of Policy and Development Studies (JPDS)</i> |
| <p><i>The paper ascertains widowhood and harmful traditional practices against women in South-East, Nigeria: challenges and prospects. Widowhood is a condition in which a woman lost her husband by death, it is a state in which a woman or widow has lost her husband by death and did not remarry. The death of a man automatically plunges his wife into widowhood, in a patriarchal society; widows are subjected to inhuman treatment at the death of their husband. Widowhood practice is an unjust cultural practice directed against women who lose their husbands, the effects of this obnoxious culture especially women in this 21st century has undermine the personality of women folk. Empirically, the paper adopts relative deprivation theory as its framework using descriptive method to investigate harmful traditional practices against women in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states respectively on their rights through cultural seclusions. Most women in South-East are not comfortable with this exclusion, nor stand to oppose this through court litigations. Most communities has not in any way abrogated these traditional harmful practices since it is an established culture, the intervention of some non-governmental organizations has in a little measure reduce some harmful punishment meted on the bereaved women. It has been observed that discriminatory widowhood practices were to humiliate women made by</i></p> | <p>Vol. 15. Issue 1 (2024) ISSN(p) 0189-5958 ISSN (e) 2814-1091 Home page https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jpds</p> <p>ARTICLE INFO: Keyword: Widowhood, Traditional Practice, Family, Cultural Practices, Bereaved</p> <p>Article History Received 15th February 2024 Accepted: 23rd March 2024 DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jpds.v15i1.11</p> |

men to relegate women to the background. The paper address some strategies to cut down these harmful practices to better the lives of women in Nigeria on the aegis of women aids collective and other non-governmental organizations.

1. Introduction

Discriminatory cultural practices are harmful traditional practices directed against women because of their sex is found mostly in south-east Nigeria comprising Abia, Imo, Enugu, Anambra and Ebonyi states (Okali, Okpara & Olawoye 2001). One of such discriminatory and harmful cultural practices that affects the standard of living of women is widowhood practices. When the husband of a woman dies, she automatically becomes vulnerable to suffering the humiliating transformation into being a widow. Widowhood cultural practice is an unfair cultural practice against women especially when it hinders the rights of women. The death of a spouse is not the same for males and female folks; invariably, when a man joins his ancestor, the deceased wife experience negative dimension in her life, it is at this point that a woman begins to mettle some rituals associated with harmful traditional practice on issue of inheritance. The widow is silence in some oppression that ends her socio-economic disposition; the widows' ordeal begins immediately the death of her husband is announced by the family (Oloko 1997). The harmful maltreatment of widows is accompanied with rituals, oppression, dehumanization and humiliation of bereaved women with traditional religious practice (Nwoga, 1989). The traditional practice on the bereaved man depends on status of the dead person, but the wife of a common man pass through traumatic wailing beating her chest, fling her arms and sat on bare floor for other women to surround her until the remains is laid to rest. Immediately after the burial the mother in-law will take her to the back of their house early in the morning to bath with cold water on harsh weather condition, and custom demands that she will be calling her husband's pet name as if he is alive for four days. She will be indoor for one month or more mourning without stepping an inch for socio-economic activities. The widow scream tears on the death of her husband or she faces fine, punishment or sanction. Widowhood varies from bad to worse depending on the status of the family affected; it affects socio-economic dislocations on the well-being of the family. A woman in Igbo culture is not accorded full social recognition no matter her status in life unless she is married and bears children or at least a child. Igbo women remain women of substance as long as their husbands are alive. If an Igbo woman loses her husband to death, her story changes. Automatically, she becomes a murder suspect in some places because death in most parts of Igbo land is never deemed a natural occurrence. The widow is seen as unclean and unholy, and as a result of people's perception of the widow, certain harmful widowhood practices are meted out to her. These practices arise from the culture of the particular Igbo community. The Igbo culture includes various customs, practices and traditions of the people. It comprises of archaic practices as well as new concepts adapted into Igbo culture either through evolution or external influence. Odimmegwa (2010) assert that in Igbo cosmology, community life embraces the living and the dead, and it is for these reasons that widowhood practices are put in place. The Igbo culture makes it incumbent on the living to respect the wishes of the dead, while the dead are compelled to protect the living. Widowhood practice is an integral part of the funeral rites accorded the

dead. This funeral rite is aimed at guaranteeing the admittance of the dead people into the abode of the ancestors, believe will ultimately reincarnate into the community of the living. Widowhood practices are not only prevalent in Igbo land; they are enforced in other tribes of Nigeria and third world countries.

Young (2006) quoting Melita (1993) noted that even in India, a widow becomes a focus of collective repudiation, seen as a bearer of bad luck, unclean, polluting and dangerous. She has to undergo rituals humiliating and some life threatening in these times of HIV/AIDS to symbolically 'cleanse' her in order to safeguard the community from her impurity. A widow, Young continues, cannot avoid standing out by the conspicuous clothing culture demands her to wear. This intense period of social rejection lasts for a relatively limited time, in some places six months while in others one year. These practices have far reaching consequences on the widow, her children and the community at large. These widowhood practices are referred to as inadvertent weapons of retrogression in community development because they are weapons unintentionally used to bring set back in the community all in the name of culture. It is against this backdrop that the paper focused on harmful traditional widowhood practices and the negative consequences on the widow, children and communities. It reflects on the interventions made by government, judiciary and several other non-governmental organizations like Women Aids Collective, recommendations and conclusions were made. Consequently, women aids collective play a major role in abrogating harmful practice in South-East through advocacy campaign, lectures, seminars, workshops to eliminate these harsh practices meted against women in South-East and Nigeria in general to liberate widows from all forms of discrimination.

2. Clarification of Concepts

Widow/Widowhood

According to Lamana & Riedman (1991), these include marriage, the birth of a first child, wedding anniversary, the arrival of the first grandchild and widowhood among others. A widow is a woman whose husband is dead and does not remarry. She can be referred to as a woman who has become single because her husband died and she remains unmarried. A woman becomes a widow when the man with whom she had planned the present and the future life is no longer available to share, shape the hopes and the dreams of years ahead. She becomes helpless as she commences a lone journey full of uncertainties of life. She is seen as a liability, powerless, voiceless and vulnerable. Boulding (2009) noted that a widow is like a melancholy bird that sits wailing all night, increasing her distress without redeeming features. She can also be seen as a woman who is done with her wedding affirmation of till death do us part. This situation gives birth to widowhood. Hence widowhood can be described as a by-product of every enduring marriage which ends with a spousal (husband) bereavement. According to Encyclopedia of Death and Dying (2008) is a woman, young or old who formally contracted her marriage under the customary marriage act or any religious act and lost her husband to death but did not remarry. Oreh (2006) states that widowhood involves a physical break in the family relations and is ranked by widows as the most stressful and devastating event in life. This is because widowhood does not only involve the loss of the role of a wife to the husband but also the loss of a person most supportive of the woman, the person who has played a central role in the woman's life, the father of her children, the family breadwinner and the companion of the woman. This transition from wifedom to a widow happens so suddenly and swiftly that in one minute a woman who is a wife transits to a widow. It is at this moment that she starts to experience all the widowhood practices under discussion.

Widowhood Practice

Every society has its own rites for the dead that affect the wife of the dead and the children in some cases. In Igbo land, this phase of life is accompanied by certain socio-cultural practices which Nwoga (1989) referred to as sets of expectation as to the actions and behaviours by the widow, actions by others towards the widow and rituals performed by or on behalf of the widow from the time of death of her husband. Later phase of these practices may include issues of inheritance, the state of the widow and marriage or remarriage of the widow. Oreh (1998) expressed that widowhood practices can be seen as socio-cultural practices encompassing burial rites, mourning rituals, inheritance rights of the widow, her expected behaviour towards others and other people's behaviour towards her arising from the death of her husband. These practices according to Nwaogugu (1989) are culture-bound because they reflect the prevailing values of a given socio-cultural milieu. Umezinwa (2007) noted that although widowhood practices are common phenomena in Igbo land, the intensity is not the same in every town. These cultural practices have portrayed the Igbo state of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States in a very bad light, particularly regarding the treatment of women who have lost their life partner, breadwinner, confidant and husband, all rolled into one. This supports the statement of Foehner & Cozart (1988) who lamented that these practices make widowhood exhaustive and traumatic and are capable of making the widow lose focus. Thus the widow is frightened, lonely and grieving excessively. In Igbo culture, widowhood practice is an exclusive preserve for widows, not widowers. Agumagu (2007) observed that a widower has no traditional lay down laws governing his mourning rites. This period which is supposed to be a quiet and private time as the widow strives to accept her loss has been turned into a period of agony, anxiety, pain and insecurity for the widow in Igbo land. This is because it is a period the widow is subjected to psychological, social, physical and emotional torture as a result of her bereavement.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopts Relative Deprivation theory as its framework as propounded by American sociologist Robert K. Merton was the first to use the concept of relative deprivation to understand social deviance (Runciman 1966). However, succeeding scholars like Townsend (1979) throw more illumination that lack of resources to sustain the diet, lifestyle, activities and amenities that an individual or group are accustomed to or that are widely encouraged or approved in the society to which they belong. This definition allows an objective comparison between the situations of a widow compared to the rest of the members of the society. Relative deprivation may be seen as the experience of being deprived of something to which one believes oneself to be entitled to (Walker and Heather, 2001). The widow is entitled to her late husband's property is denied such property thereby rendering her powerless and voiceless. Shaefer (2008) defines relative deprivation as the conscious experience of a negative discrepancy between legitimate expectations and present actualities. Consequently it has important consequences for both behaviour and attitudes including stress, political attitudes and participation in collective action of a widow that will bring about community development. Hence the behaviour and attitude of a widow who lost her husband to death change overnight from wealth to poverty, clean to unclean as perceived, good woman to evil widow. However, this situation of discontent ought to push a widow into joining social movements to end it but widows we know are prone to conflict avoidance, are short term oriented and they believe that imminent life difficulties may arise since there is no guarantee that in their life-improvement will result from social action. This is a true condition of denial, marginalization, and exclusion of a widow.

Widowhood Practices in Igbo Land, Meaning and Rationale

Ritual Seclusion (*Ino na nso*): This involves the widow being secluded in a most restricted manner because the widow is regarded as defiled and unclean. She does not enjoy the company of other 'free' human beings until she is purified.

Programmed Wailing: The widow wails early every morning before and after the funeral to the hearing of people in the neighborhood to demonstrate the depth of her grief over the death of her husband.

Sitting on the floor: The widow is compelled to sit on the floor by the "*Umuada*" as a sign of dethronement of the widow who has lost her status and pride by the death of her husband.

Sleeping or sitting next to the corpse This practice mandates a widow to sit by her husband's corpse or to lie down on a mat beside the corpse. This is done to accord the dead respect and to enjoy his company for the last time.

Oath ritual: The widow is subjected to this practice by being forced to drink the water used in bathing the corpse. It serves as a proof of innocence either of the widow killing her husband or hiding his property from the in-laws. The practice of oath taking serves as moral deterrent to other married women in anticipation of their own ordeal.

Shaving of hair: In Igbo land, it is a common belief that the beauty of a woman is for her husband only. Her hair is therefore shaved to make the widow feel less complete or less womanly since her duties as a wife are no longer useful. Most widows on their own see it as an outward show of their grief and so majority of widows shave their hairs voluntarily. This shaving is often done leaving cuts in the scalp of the widow because it is roughly done. This contradicts Deuteronomy 14:1 which says: "Since you are the people of the Lord your God, never cut yourself or shave the hair above your foreheads for the sake of the dead".

Tying up of hands in rags: Okoye (2001), assert that in Uzo-Uwani LGA in Enugu State, the widow's hands are tied up in rags in the manner of the boxer's gloves for three months. During this period, the widow does not eat with her hands, thus she experiences a period of starvation unless she is fed by another widow. This is to show the widow that she has lost her freedom.

Forced to take a bath on her husband's grave: the widow is forced to take a bath on the husband's grave and to run back naked inside the house as a sign of severing her relationship with her dead husband.

Stipulated period of mourning: In some Igbo communities a widow is expected to compulsorily mourn with a stipulated mourning outfit for six months or one year. This is an outward show of grief. One may wonder whether a widow ever stops mourning her husband except by being forced to do so.

Dropping of condolence gifts on the ground: Monetary presents are dropped on the ground for the widow. She is not expected to stretch out her hands to receive them because she is too unclean to receive gifts from other people's hands. That way she is also forbidden from shaking hands with anybody.

Widow inheritance (Forceful remarriage): This is called (*Nkuchi nwanji*) or forceful remarriage of a widow to her husband's younger brother or a close relation. This way the widow is assured that she will not be disinherited of her husband's properties or driven out of her matrimonial home. This widow inheritance is called levirate arrangement. This arrangement has its own problems. The children of the widow may not like it, and the first wife of the younger brother may feel threatened.

Wearing of black or white mourning outfit: is often associated with evil and the widow is expected to wear this outfit first to be noticed as a widow and secondly as someone who has an

evil omen. The Christian mothers now insist on wearing white instead of black. Whether it is black or white, there is no difference, since mourning outfits are the same because they have the same interpretation.

Disinheritance of a widow: This is a situation where a widow is not allowed to inherit any property of her husband. Igbo land is mainly a patriarchal society in which a widow is seen as a chattel of her husband and his family. As a chattel, she is incapable of owning or inheriting a property but she qualifies to be inherited herself. The only exception is if the woman has a living male child who can inherit part of his father's property and through him the mother may benefit. It is worse in a matrilineal society where the members of the man's maternal family particularly the man's brothers, sisters and their children dispossess the dead man's biological children of their father's property. This practice contradicts section 36 of the Nigerian Marriage Act which stipulates that a widow with children is entitled to one-third of her husband's estate.

Where the widow has no child, she is entitled to half of her husband's estate. The above therefore indicates that on paper, a widow and her children are entitled to inherit from the dead man's estate as sole beneficiaries. In practice this is not the case. The customary law contradicts Section 36 of the Nigerian Marriage Act. Disinheritance of widows is one major problem suffered by widows across board. Nwoga (1989) assert that it is acquisitiveness that controls the treatment of a widow especially in the area of inheritance. The widow is thus dehumanized and humiliated by these religious rituals and other practices.

Empirical Evidence of widowhood Practices in Igbo-land

Oreh, (1998) carried out a baseline survey using two Community Based Associations (CBAs) in Ozu Abam, Arochuku LGA, Abia State. The first was the Ozu Abam Development Union Home and Abroad Women's Wing and the second was the Ozu Abam Development Union (OADU) General. The General Association was predominantly male while the women's wing was for all the women, widows inclusive. There were two hundred and four (204) widows, eight hundred and six (806) other female members of the women's wing. There were also eight hundred (800) males of the OADU General. The purpose of the study was to investigate widowhood practices in this matrilineal Igbo community and to ascertain how the two Community-Based Associations responded to these practices.

Findings from the study revealed the following:

1. A widow is confined for eight days after the funeral.
2. The master bedroom is locked when a man dies.
3. Shaving of hair is done by Umuada, the widow will go to stream and wash her uncleanness.
4. A widow has no inheritance right whatsoever. Her husband's property and farmland are automatically taken over by her husband's brothers, the sisters and their children.
5. There was no law prohibiting widowhood practices in the constitutions of the community associations before this paper and women want it to be enshrined in the constitution.
6. Women are more eager to stop these practices than their men counterpart.
7. The challenge identified by widows was the issue of disinheritance.
8. The only practice that the widows wanted to be sustained was eight days confinement.
9. Other members of the associations that are non-widows and males shave hair and wear mourning costume and outfit as permitted by the culture.

Disinheritance of a widow is more severe on a widow who is an indigene because a non-indigene wife is regarded as her husband's family member and sister and so is treated more kindly.

Azikiwe (1994) equally conducted a study on Widowhood Practices in Afikpo Community.

Afikpo is another matri-lineal community in Ebonyi State. This study was conducted to investigate widowhood practices in Afikpo Community in Ebonyi State. Two hundred and ten widows were surveyed with structured questionnaire and focus group discussion techniques, while data were analyzed with percentages. The findings include that some major differences exist in widowhood practices between Afikpo Community and other parts of Igboland. That traditionalist is the perpetrators of the oppressive practices and widows comply to these inhuman practices to escape their consequences and thus comply with these culture and superstition. He revealed that a widow experienced ten out of the sixteen widowhood practices listed include:

1. A widow sits and sleeps on a mat on the bare floor for 7 native weeks (28 days).
 2. Wails twice, morning and evening, every day for 28 days.
 3. Takes no bath until after burial of the corpse.
 4. Confined to a room for 28 days.
 5. Takes an oath before juju if one is suspected to be responsible for the death of her husband.
 6. Some form of sacrifices are performed to sever the link with the dead husband.
 7. Hair is shaved after burial of husband.
 8. A widow is regarded as unclean and untouchable for 28 days.
 9. Denied personal hygiene: bath, chewing stick, combing hair, washing and changing cloth.
 10. Denied much basic comfort such as lying down when 'you feel' like it, eating what you want.
- Based on Igbo cultures, a widow in Afikpo does not eat with unwashed hands and plates for 28 days, does not mourn for one year, nor forced to shave their hair nor wear any mourning cloth.

Iika and Iika (2005) titled "Eliminating Gender-Based Violence: Learning from the Widowhood Practices Eliminating Initiative of Women Organization in Ozubulu, Anambra State of Nigeria. The study reports the activities and outcomes of a Christian Women group initiative to eliminate dehumanizing widowhood practices, a prevalent type of gender-based violence among the Igbos in Eastern Nigeria. Through in-depth interviews, group discussions, participant observations and membership records, information was elicited on the processes and outcomes of the women group initiative. The study identified the principal dehumanizing widowhood rites and practices to include the following:

1. Drinking washings from husband's corpse.
2. Crawling over husband's corpse.
3. A widow not having a bath until eight market days (one month).
4. Sitting on bare floor during the period of mourning.
5. Programmed crying aloud to the hearing of the villagers to demonstrate grief.
6. Restriction movement to market, church, social events for the one year period of mourning.
7. Loss of right of inheritance, if she has no male child.
8. Compulsory fasting on the day of her husband's burial.
9. Punishment for refusal to shave the widow's hair by the Umuada.
10. Long mourning and restriction period.
11. Wife inheritance or forced marriage by close relatives.
12. Stigmatizing a widow who died within the period and refuse her corpse burial rites.

During the brainstorming sessions, women agreed that these widowhood practices affected their physical and mental health and infringed on their human and reproductive rights. In their conclusive meeting, they resolved as follows:

1. To reduce the mourning period to six months.

2. To reduce confinement to home to one month.
3. Widows should have option of wearing black or white as mourning dress for not more than six months. Widows should not wear necklace, earrings or coloured dress.
4. Laws stipulating not bathing and ritual bathing should be abolished.
5. On no account should widows drink washings from the dead husband's corpse.
6. Widows who die within the customary mourning period should be accorded full burial rights.
7. Christian women of every zone shave the widow after the burial of her husband not Umuada.
8. Widows should comport themselves and avoid sexual activities that could make them pregnant while mourning their husbands.
9. Zones that go against these recommendations should be penalized.

From the findings of this study, it is evident that widowhood practices are still on in Igbo land particularly in Anambra State. Women organization was used to minimize some of these harmful practices. Other such organizations in other places should emulate them.

On the 14th of January, 1998, the wife of the then Military Administrator Barrister Hapsatu Ahman, Chairperson Enugu State Family Support Programme inaugurated the 7-man Enugu State Widows Welfare Committee. The terms of reference of the committee were to visit the Local Government Areas in Enugu State and to research into the current mourning rites of widows. Consequent upon that Okoye, Nwadinobi, Okpe, Okosieme, Okonkwo, Ifejika, Ndubuisi, Aneke, Otaluka, Oji, & Emehelu (2001) planned and conducted a survey in the then 12 Local Government Areas of Enugu State. Their survey covered true life testimonies of widows; harmful traditional practices in Enugu State; Social aspects of widowhood practices in Enugu State; Economic Implications of the plight of widows; Widowhood: A Psychological Trauma; findings of a survey on the public opinion on the plight of widows in Enugu State; Reflections on widowhood practices and widows rights, and the legal status of widows in Enugu State; and then conclusion. Findings of the survey from all local council areas are as follows:

- i. Disinheritance, first hair shaving, untouchable, health problems, confinement, mourning period, were found to be operational everywhere. Widows were confined for one year in Awgu, 3 months in Uzo-Uwani and Udeni LGAs and 28 days in other LGAs.
- ii. Ritual cleansing was done in Enugu-East, Uzo-Uwani, Awgu and Aninri LGAs.
- iii. Naked walk was only prevalent in Uzo-Uwani, Igbo-Etiti, and Awgu LGAs.
- iv. Sleeping on the floor was still going on in Uzo-Uwani, and Aninri LGAs.
- v. Sitting on the floor: Igbo-Eze North, Udeni, Ezeagu and Aninri.
- vi. No bathing: Igbo-Eze North, Udeni, Uzo-Uwani and Aninri.
- vii. Routine crying: Udeni, Uzo-Uwani, Awgu and Aninri.
- viii. Fed by others: Uzo-Uwani.
- ix. Silence: Enugu-East, Nkanu East and Nkanu West.

It has been noted that harmful widowhood practices are prevalent in Enugu State with different intensities in different communities and local government areas.

Widowhood Practices in Imo State: Better Life Program for Women Workshop (1989).

Contributors in this workshop include Afigbo, Obinna, Njoku, Nwaogugu, Uwa, Nzewi, Nosiri, Nwebo, Nwakanma, Okwuosa. Nzewi, (1989) observed that widow's ordeal begins immediately the death of her husband is announced. The in-laws demand a list of the man's property, holdings, investments, bank account. She is required to take an oath as a proof that she has not concealed any relevant information of her husband's wealth. Such oath-taking, she continued are not all that simple in nature. The oaths are taken as part of the widowhood rituals during which the society's expectations of the widow are spelt out to her. Such sets of expectations usually

delineate the actions, the fate and the behaviours that are expected of the widow. Nzewi's findings among others indicated that compulsory crying and wailing by widows was enforced in Imo State including; imposition of fines by Umuada and Umumboto, striping of the widow. From the findings of the five empirical studies of the five South-Eastern States, widowhood rituals and practices are still very much prevalent.

The Challenges Associated with Widowhood and Harmful Traditional Practice in Igboland

The loss of a spouse is recognized as painful and distressing experience associated with many challenges after bereavement. There are disruptions of widow's social relationships, deteriorating health and physical capacity, as well as declining financial resources that compound the loss of a spouse, these challenges are articulated hereunder:

Poverty According to Genyi and George-Genyi (2013) many Nigerian widows are pauperized by widowhood practices. These practices drastically reduce the economic status of widows upon the death of their husband. United Nations (2011), stated that poverty is beyond income and it includes well being or good life in a multidimensional sense that comprises both material and psychological components. Well being on the other hand encompasses peace of mind, good health and safety, freedom of choice and action and being able to associate in a community. Well being means also a dependable livelihood and a steady source of income. All these can by no means contribute to community development when they are lacking.

Physical and Psychological traumas: Widowhood practices cause physical and psychological traumas on the widows. If the widows are denied autonomy and means to live productive and creative lives, they are also denied the opportunity to social and economic development of themselves, their families and their communities.

Violence: Widowhood practices amount to violence against women. Violence against women by Article (j) of the protocol to the African charter on human and people's rights, on the rights of women in Africa, accounts for all acts perpetrated against women which cause or could cause them physical, sexual, psychological and economic harm, including the threat to take arbitrary restrictions on or deprivation of fundamental freedoms in private or public life in peace time and during situations of armed conflicts or of war. When violence is directed against a woman because she is a woman or where such violence affects women disproportionately, this described the Convention on Elimination of forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW) Recommendation No. 19 (a) as gender-based violence. This violence includes inflicting physical, mental or sexual harm, threats of such acts, coercion and deprivations of liberty.

Pressure to Amorous Relationship: Death is a leveler and this men courageously begin to make sexual advances to the widow, especially males from the husband's side and beyond use it as a yardstick to protect their interest when the need arises as fondly serve as a mechanic servicing the car engine to avert knocking down. Sexuality is not just all about the act but the tenderness, warmth, touching, caressing by a husband. As long as a woman is healthy her sexual urges and abilities remain active. The older the woman, the less active she becomes sexually contrary to widowers of the same age. Also the older the widows are, the more reluctant they become to accept non-marital sex than men are. Widows also believe that sexual activities should end with menopause and so should suppress whatever sexual urges they may have. Many widows generally attach more significance to physical appearance than men do, so they are reluctant to expose their aging bodies to sexual relationship. There are men however who think that what a widow needs is sex. They pursue a widow and offer her their sexual services. They think she is anxious and so will be a pushover. Widows should know that there is no way out of sexual immorality without consequences abortion, STDs, HIV/AIDS. Widows should remember:

- a) Isaiah 58: 8 – *Your maker is your husband, so be faithful to him.*
- b) I Peter 2: 11 – *Abstain from fleshy lusts which war against the soul.*
- c) I Corinthians 6:18 – *Flee from sexual immorality. Every sin that a man commits is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.*
- d) 1 Cor 6:13 – *The body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord and the Lord for the body.*

Dismantling the Age Long Tradition The age long practice in our traditions should be modified by educating the traditional rulers and elders on the consequences of these practices and how they affect the children, who are the growing society. The committees should be formed in localities to review and eradicate these obnoxious practices, and replace them with the modern trend of law. Patriarchy should be eliminated to achieve the gender equality over the years.

Child up-bringing: Omartain (2001) noted that parenting can be the best of jobs and can also be the most difficult of jobs. It can bring joy, it can cause the greatest pain. It can be fulfilling and exhilarating. It can be depleting and exhausting. It can make one feel like a success when all is going well or like a failure when things go wrong. As a result of changes in life especially after the loss of a spouse, widows sometimes sail smoothly and at other times encounter tempests and tidal waves. Sometimes they feel like giving up and at others that are encouraged. A widow needs God's help to bring up her children God's own way. It is the power of God that penetrates a child's life when the mother prays. The continued permanent absence of the father places on the mother the principal responsibility for the child's socialization especially in the face of bereavement. The single parent child concentrates on the mother first before interacting with others. Because he lacks father figure, sex-typing and sex identification may be lacking. The child may be less assertive and more dependent on peers. The single parent child is often at cross roads in terms of discipline because some widows are afraid of their child's anticipated misbehavior and tend to be too hard on the child, thus creating friction. Some other widows in contrast may be permissive. In some cases, the child may feel rejected and develop inferiority complex. This may affect his academic achievement. The child may also be aggressive because anytime others talk about their fathers, he/she becomes angry.

Widows should be guided by the following Scriptures:

- a) Proverbs 22: 6 – *Train up a child the way he should go, when he grows up he will not depart from it.*
- b) Proverbs 23:13 – *Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod he will not die.*
- c) Proverbs 29: 15 – *The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child let to himself disgraces his mother.*

In-laws: Despite one's mode of marriage in Igbo land, it is believed that a woman is not just married to the man but to the family. To a large extent in-laws have influence on the widow at the time of her bereavement. They are the perpetrators of widowhood practices. Widow of the 21st century in Igbo land has greater advantage and opportunities of receiving justice than her counterpart a couple of years back. Widows should assert their rights in a most civilized manner.

Financial Challenges: plague widows and because of the changing times and expectations, the widow is expected to take care of herself without the work experience and the financial knowledge to do so. The reasons are that some deaths occur suddenly while others follow a long illness. Some marriages are short and sweet while others are long and bitter. Some couples had discussed financial matters while others did not. No matter the widow's particular circumstance(s), financial challenges must arise and must be addressed.

Causes of financial challenge abound and may include:

- Prolonged and extravagant funerals
- Low income or earning by the widow
- No income at all
- Fines imposed on the widow by “Umuada”
- Disinheritance of the widow of her husband’s estate by the in-laws

Widows are advised to begin early to prepare for the rainy days because no rainy days can be worse than the days of widowhood.

Strategies by NGOs to eliminate widowhood harmful practice against women in Igbo land

Women aids collective is committed to promote women and young people’s rights from violence and abuse by law, WACOL foster democratic free society on human lives especially Nigerian women that have been consigned to the kitchen. This situation has lend credence to the age long notion that women’s education ends in kitchen. They are relegated to the background as second fiddle; their opinions never count as they are compelled to subordinate position in the family, men play piper and dictate the tune. Women aids collective foster a democratic society free from violence and abuse of women rights in accordance with law. Aya (2002) state thus:

The future worth creating brings socio-economic, political equity, balance cultural practices and equal opportunity for everyone to effect humanitarian action fostering awareness and understanding of complex problems inhibiting the actualization on women rights

- **Creating welfare services:** social factors like illiteracy, unemployment, lack of initiative, ill-health makes it difficult to cope with the up keep of the family. WACOL has aid widows by creating welfare services on their economic needs through government established body in western countries of USA, Norway and Ireland. Obi (1986) states that widows are cared for under social security scheme, such scheme if handled carefully will give a new lease of life to hopeless widows.
- **Enlightenment campaigns:** The campaign by women’s aid collective in sensitizing men on the need to write and deposit their will of consent in the law court with private lawyers before their death to enable widow take its rightful place when the destined tragedy occur to avoid maltreatment on certain harmful traditional practices from their relatives. It can be inform of seminars, workshops, conferences and symposium to network for change in cognizant to restore women’s rights of inheritance denied for donkey years. The provisions of statutory laws in most countries for women and girl child to inherit property on the death of their husband or father, right to economic, social, cultural and freedom from discrimination on the basis of sex, African society must protect women from rights of inheritance and there is need for women’s aid collective as non-governmental organization to network for change. WACOL has intervene on the evil tradition meted against widows because women has a great deal in waging war against them, most times they help in sustaining most of the degrading customs which came from several legal cases on them concerning inheritance rights, they blamed the maltreatments meted out to widows and attribute cause to their uncompromising attitudes, they should work seriously against breaking of institutional and cultural barriers that inhibit women participation in development process.

Formal education: In Igbo land, illiteracy has directly or indirectly put women in abject poverty and economic empowerment for political participation, education is an access to

employment and control of economic resources. Women should advocate sending their sons and daughters to school for basic education (wacolnigeria.org/actionwomendoc). The power intoxication among daughters and widows husband relatives is dominant on the assessment of their performance, as a married woman they will realize how discriminatory the effects of these practice, but these daughters will one day marry somewhere else and will face the same ritual on the death of their own husbands, the ordeal a widow pass through is burdensome. It is irrational for umuada to encourage such since they will face similar treatment in somebody's home. Individual are warned to desist from maltreating widows in all ramifications to avoid the wrath of the lord.

3. Conclusion and Suggestions

The societal palliative has been exhausted for positive change especially on harmful traditional widowhood practice enhances women aids collective to reform widowhood in Igbo culture, widows with injurious background should rely on God as her husband and god is ready to grant their request to protect and fight their enemies. When a widow is busy she will think less about the bereavement especially now that she is alone to shoulder the economic responsibilities of the family, she needs mini-employment to keep the family moving economically.

The public both men and women should be enlightened on the harmful effects of these rituals and their eradication. Handbills should be printed and shared out, so that the literate and semi-illiterate ones can read. Some churches should assist in this drive by carrying out enlightenment campaign to eradicate obnoxious widowhood practices. Religious worshippers should also be taught the need for the eradication of such practices.

Most states in Nigeria should form commission and Non-governmental organization to take care of the plights of widows. They should fight against the harmful, obnoxious, inhuman and degrading treatment against widows; making sure that widows are protected always and the property of their husbands given to them for their upkeep and the training of their children, especially the very young widows, whose husbands died early in their marriages. This commission should establish Widows Centres and Associations, where all widows should meet on monthly basis to report and discourse any ill treatment and harmful cultural practices against them in the villages and their late husband's family.

These centres and associations are expected to fight for the widows' right, take the culprits to court and pay the litigation fee if need be. The widows should always speak out and lodge complaint with the centres and associations.

Women should have quality education, so as to know their rights and enforce it. Women should study professional courses to be employed in lucrative jobs for fat remuneration to take care of their needs, like having money to enforce their rights in court, taking care of their children. Also, the essence of empowering women academically will abolish these harmful practices against poor widows.

The spouse marriage in their lifetimes should endeavour to make valid wills. The husband in the marriage should make a will bequeathing his property to his wife to avoid obnoxious custom and tradition to his hard earned property. This property is often acquired with the active support of both spouses.

Some schools should be involved in war against obnoxious widowhood practices. This should be drawn in secondary and university curricula under civic education and humanities as GS for all. The students should be aware on the effects of these rituals and the need to eradicate them.

The judiciary arm is saddled to interpret law; the courts are the fulcrum of these interpretations. The judges should look into the plights of the widows, when cases are brought before them in court. The laws should be interpreted to be in line with the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This will lead to making of decisions that are constitutional, and in the respect of the rule of law and the widows' human rights to enthrone equality; the widows will be happy for equality is equity. If these right judgments are pronounced by the courts, this will ensure enforcement, consequently the polity will be free from these harmful practices and the inequality and discrimination against widows will be laid to rest.

Women or daughter should inherit from her father's property and wife inherit from her husband's property for this is in line with the equality and non-discrimination provided in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Widowhood laws and international regional norms. The custom that disinherits a woman of property should be declared repugnant to natural justice, equity and good conscience.

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