

PERSISTENCY OF THE REPREHENSIBLE CULTURAL PRACTICES AGAINST WIDOWS OF THE WIDOWHOOD CLASSES IN NIGERIA: LEGAL ANALYSIS.*

Abstract

Nigeria is among the African Countries that value her cultural practices particularly on the widowhood practice. Despite the existence of the various legal instruments such as the Constitutional provisions, States Laws, judicial pronouncements, international treaties or Conventions which Nigeria are signatories to among other things that all prohibit the application of the reprehensible cultural practices against widows. The widows are still facing painful and harmful treatment being meted out to them immediately after the demised of their husbands which often cover their mourning period and even after. The Nigerian Societies hold tenaciously to these reprehensible cultural practices against widows to the extent that laws have little or no impact on these practices. It is against this backdrop that this article examines persistency of the reprehensible cultural practices against widows of the widowhood classes in Nigeria: legal analysis. It is the recommendation of this study that women need to be sufficiently informed on their rights before, during and after their mourning rites to avoid being subjected to the reprehensible cultural practices against widows in Nigeria.

Keywords: Widows, Nigeria, Reprehensible, Widowhood classes, Cultural Practices.

1. Introduction

Widowhood is a situation whereby a man or a woman loses her wife or husband respectively and widowhood classes are, therefore, widowers' class or widows' class. In Nigeria, widowers are not subjected to all forms of dehumanizing cultural practices that their widows' counterparts are being subjected to. This is perhaps because widowhood cultural practices believe that widowers quickly need to move on with life following the demise of their wives and even have licensed to hurriedly remarry to prevent the spirit of their late wives from disturbing them. Whereas, 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.¹

It is, paramount to point out that various measures have being taken in arresting all forms of dehumanizing cultural practices which their widows are often subjected to, which include; application of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) 1999, (as amended),² various States in Nigeria have enacted laws to protect widowhood in their States,³ Similarly, there are international protection for the widows which include; Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948, International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) 1966, International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) 1966, Convention against Torture and other cruel, inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) 1984, African Charter on Human and People's Rights 1981, among others. Specific international protection for widows is the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This convention ratified by Nigeria in 1986 brings to the fore the commitment of the Nigerian government to eradicate all forms of discrimination

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¹ G E Afolaya, 'Widowhood Practices and the Rights of Women: The Case of South Western Nigeria' (2011)<<http://thesis.eur.nl/pub/1081>> accessed 22 November, 2022.

² 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, ss 34, 35 and 40.

³ The Prohibition of Infringement of a Widow or Widower's Fundamental Rights of Enugu State 2001 and Malpractices Against Widows and Widowers (Prohibition) Law of Anambra State 2005.

against women in civil, social, cultural fundamental and political rights.⁴ Expectedly, these laws and international protection instruments should serve as a shield against all forms of reprehensible cultural practices against widows in Nigeria, this article, however, posited that the reverse in the case.

Consequently, this study examines widowhood's reprehensible cultural practices against widows, legal instruments that protect widows from all forms of reprehensible cultural practices, considers the judicial pronouncements in that regard and lucidly dissects reasons behind the persistence of the reprehensible cultural practices against widows in Nigeria and accordingly recommends the way forward for the widows.

2. Widowhood Reprehensible Cultural Practices against Widows

In a bid to preserve cultures, different kinds of reprehensible cultural practices are tenaciously retained that are inimical to the plates of widows whose husbands died unexpectedly in most cases. These practices are dehumanizing, degrading, barbaric obnoxious, anachronistic and grossly immoral.⁵ 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 family⁶. These reprehensible cultural practices include;

- a. **Complete Cutting of the Widow's Hair on Her Head:** Upon the demise of a woman's husband, it is the practice in most cultural practices in Nigeria to shave the hair on the head of the widow. It is culturally believed that cutting her hair is one of the ways of showing that the widow is truly mourning her late husband and her refusal could arouse suspicion of involving in her late husband's death. The widow is compulsively taken behind the kitchen, near a bush and given a clean shave by these women with ordinary razor blades despite the health risks as no one verifies the health status of these unscrupulous workers.⁷ Even though the argument shows it as a mark of respect for the dead husband, but it could be made optional because of the health risks involved.⁸
- b. **Living in Isolation for Months as a Widow:** Following the demise of a man, his wife who is now a widow often confined to a place with the cultural belief that isolating the widow to a place would prevent the spirit of the deceased husband from restlessness. If she needs anything she has to look for someone to do that for her and this makes the situation of a widow who is childless, breastfeeding a baby or sick very deplorable as the law has no consideration.⁹
- c. **Crying At All Times to Show Sense of Grief:** It is culturally acceptable in many parts of Nigeria that a widow must develop a habit of crying at all times to show that the death of her husband is a monumental loss which can only be expressed with crying at all times. The woman is expected to wail and cry loudly at her husband's death, and show a deep sense of grief.¹⁰ In some cultures the woman is forced to cry aloud morning and night.¹¹ It is posited that the cultural dictates of making a widow who is experiencing psychological torture of

⁴ M I O Nwogu, 'The Domestic Application of Feminist International Human Rights Treaties in Nigeria' (2008) 1(1) *Journal of Women and Minority Rights* 78.

⁵ M I O Nwogu, 'The Legal Anatomy of Cultural Widowhood Practices in South Eastern Nigeria: The Need For A Panacea' (2015) 3(1) *Global Journal of Politics and Law Research* 80.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ C O Ogu, D O Obi & Emenike I P 'Widowhood Practices and its Challenges on the Human Dignity of Widows in Nneato in Imo State, West Africa in the 21st Century' (2020) 9(11) *International Journal of Science and Research* 1051.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Nwogu (n 5) 80.

¹¹ *ibid.*

her husband's death crying are a reprehensible cultural practice. This is because a long time of crying could affect the sight of the widow thereby exposing her to early blindness and if this happened society, mostly her late husband's siblings could conclude that her blindness is due to her involvement in the demise of her husband. Furthermore, forcing the widow to compulsory wailing may lead to headaches, hypertension which also endanger her life and tramples on her rights to life and personal liberty.¹²

- d. Act of Compelling the Widow to Drink a Cup of Water with Which Her Deceased Husband Washed:** It is a reprehensible cultural practice when a widow is compelled to drink a cup of water used to wash the lifeless body of her late husband. Drinking of the water used to wash the corpse of the deceased husband where there is strong contention about the death of the husband to prove her innocence and may not have concealed anything from the relations of the man especially his material possessions.¹³ The woman drinking bath water from a corpse, may die out of the disease from the water or psychological trauma and not because she killed her husband.¹⁴ A cumulative effect is that such practice is reprehensible and a widow is always at the receiving end.
- e. Abstinance by Coercion:** A widow, upon the demise of her husband, is forcefully restricted from involving in certain things, such as stopped from eating certain foods, prevented from attending social functions regardless of who is inviting her and so on. This is because a widow is considered not fit and proper to appear in such places and if she acted against such restriction, she will be tagged as masterminded the demise of her husband. Additionally, in some cultures, the widow cannot eat any of the food items provided for the funeral of the husband and she is also forbidden to eat the same dish with her children and family members for a considerable number of weeks this is because she is considered ritually unclean.¹⁵
- f. Preventing a Widow from Inheriting the Family Properties:** It is a common phenomenon for the siblings of the deceased husband to prevent a widow from dealing with the properties (as in landed property or vehicles among others) of the family immediately after the demise of her husband. This is since, traditionally, women are excluded from ownership of landed property which is culturally the exclusive preserve of men.¹⁶ This article reasons that it is intriguing to note that in most cases the deceased husband and the widow jointly worked to acquire the property which the siblings of the deceased are preventing the widow from dealing with. It is, therefore, argues that the idea of preventing a widow from accessing such properties is a reprehensible cultural practice against the widow. It is noteworthy that in some cultural practices, once a widow does not have a male child for her late husband, she and her daughters cannot inherit the properties of the deceased. In another cultural practice, once the deceased husband has no surviving male child, the widow must seek and obtain the deceased husband's family consent before dealing with any property of the deceased husband.¹⁷ The consent may be actual or implied from the circumstances of the case, but she cannot assume ownership of the property or alienate it.¹⁸ According to the United Nations Report on Widows in Africa;

apart from the feeling of trauma, grief or loss following the death of their husband, widows often face economic insecurity, discrimination, stigmatisation and harmful traditional practices, simply because of their marital status. In many countries, widows do not have equal inheritance rights, they may be

¹² Nwogu (n 6) 84.

¹³ (Ogu, Obi & Isidiho (n 8) 1051.

¹⁴ Nwogu (n 6) 81.

¹⁵ (Ogu, Obi & Isidiho (n 8) 1051.

¹⁶ Nwogu (n 6) 84.

¹⁷ *Nezianya & Anor v Okagbue & Ors* [1963] All NLR 358.

¹⁸ Nwogu (n 6) 84.

*stripped of their land, evicted from their homes or even separated from their children. Furthermore, they may be denied access to inheritance, bank accounts and credit, which can have a significant financial impact on them, their children and future generations.*¹⁹

It is submitted that the deceased husband's family consent is not always automatic as the family would always find reasons to either refused to grant the consent or attached insurmountable conditions to granting the consent.

3. Legal Instruments that Protect Widows from all Forms of Reprehensible Cultural Practices

a. Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) 1999: It is a parental law in Nigeria to the extent that all laws and persons must be subjected to.²⁰ It is against this position of law that CFRN frown against all forms of dehumanizing acts that widows might be subjected to. For instance, the inhuman treatment, like compulsory shaving of widows' hair, seclusion, dethronement and so on violate the widows' right to the dignity of the human person, personal liberty and peaceful association.²¹ Similarly, CFRN protects widows from compulsorily marry and having sex with any brother of his demised husband on the ground of cultural practice.²² Additionally, CFRN protect widows from infringing on their right to freedom of association,²³ right to private and family life,²⁴ right to life,²⁵ among others.

b. States Laws Prohibiting All Forms of Reprehensible Cultural Practices against Widows: To protect widows from agony, physical and psychological torture from society especially from the siblings or family of their demised husband, various States through their respective State Houses of Assembly have enacted laws to that effect. For instance, Malpractices against Widows and Widowers (Prohibition) Law of Anambra State (MAWWPLAS) 2005 provides that;

(1) No persons shall compel a widow or widower:

(a) To vacate his or her matrimonial home on the ground that he or she has no male child or no child at all

(b) To drink the water used in washing the corpse of the late spouse or to perform any type of ritual in order to establish innocence of causing the death of the late spouse;

(c) To sleep either alone or on the same bed or to be locked in the room with the corpse of the late spouse;

(d) To remain in compulsory confinement after the death of the spouse for any given period;

(e) To compulsorily wear mourning cloths of any make or otherwise adopt any life style indicative of being in mourning for any given period from the date of the death of the late spouse;

(f) To compulsorily sit on the bare floor or be naked during any period of the spouse's burial rites;

(g) To be remarried to a relative of the late spouse;

(h) To shave the hairs on the head or any other part of the body;

¹⁹ UN Report on Women in Africa <<https://www.unwomen.org>> accessed 23 November 2022.

²⁰ CFRN, Section 1(3).

²¹ Nwogu (n 6) 84; CFRN Sections 34 35 and 40.

²² CFRN Section 40.

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ CFRN Section 37.

²⁵ CFRN Section 33.

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- (i) To desist from receiving condolence visits from sympathizers during the period of mourning;
- (j) To weep and wail loudly at intervals at any time after the death of the late spouse;
- (k) To put ashes on the head;
- (l) Not to see the corpse of the late spouse;
- (m) To perform any act which contravenes the fundamental human rights provisions as enshrined in the constitution;
- (n) To visit any shrine and or perform any other rituals.
- (o) To forsake his or her personal hygiene.²⁶

It is opined that even though this law is lucid and capable of protecting widows from reprehensible cultural practices, exploiting them remains an issue which is often low, hence the persistence of the reprehensible cultural practices against widows.

Additionally, the punishment section states that;

- (1) Any person who discriminates, contravenes or conspires with, aids, counsel, procures or assists another person to contravene the provisions of section 4 of this law commits an offence and shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding N20, 000.00 (twenty thousand Naira) or to a jail term not exceeding six months imprisonment or to both such fine and imprisonment.
- (2) Any institution, group or organization which is found to have contravened, or which aids, counsels, procures or assists any person to contravene any of the provisions of section 4 of this law commits an offence and shall on summary conviction be liable to a fine not exceeding N50, 000.00 (fifty thousand naira) or be proscribed until the fine is paid.²⁷

This article opined that the sum of N20,000.00 (twenty thousand Naira) and N50,000.00 (fifty thousand naira) respectively are too small as fine for crime against widow whose late husband's siblings or family or society has been dehumanized and experiencing permanent psychological torture. Section 6 of the same law went ahead and provided for its enforcement, thus, vesting the Magistrate Court with the jurisdiction to summarily try any offence under this law.²⁸ The appeals shall lie as of right against any decision of the Magistrate Court to the High Court, up to the Supreme Court.²⁹ Similarly, the Abia State Rehabilitation and Protection of Widows Law, (ABRPWL) 2011 protect widows from reprehensible cultural practices. It provides that;

- (2) A widow shall not be prevented from inheriting her matrimonial home and her husband's properties by reason of not having male children or for not having any child for her late husband;
- (3) A widow shall not be forced into a levirate marriage just to secure a share in her husband's property for herself and her children;
- (4) A widow shall not be considered as one of her husband's properties to be inherited by members of her husband's family;
- (5) Where a widow has been excluded from a share in her husband's estate by his will, the widow may still seek maintenance from the deceased's estate;
- (6) (a) Where in the exercise of a testator's to bequeath his properties as he pleases, there are no maintenance provisions for the widow, the court shall make

²⁶ MAWWPLAS, section 4.

²⁷ *ibid*, section 5.

²⁸ *ibid*, section 5; Nwogu (n 6) 86.

²⁹ *ibid*.

an order for the maintenance of the widow, notwithstanding the provisions of the will.³⁰

It is submitted that this law is apt in prescribing protection forms for widows and placing necessary restrictions on the family members of the widow's late husband. Moreover, the law enumerated prohibitions against widows within the State when it states;

4. (1) No person for whatever purpose or reason shall compel a widow as follows:
- (a) to permit the hairs on the head or any other part of the body to be shaved;
 - (b) to sleep either alone or on the same bed or be locked in a room with corpse of the husband;
 - (c) not to receive condolence visits from sympathizers during the period of mourning;
 - (d) to be re-married by a relative of the late husband;
 - (e) to sit on the floor or be naked during any period of the husband's burial rites;
 - (f) to drink the water used in washing the corpse of the husband;
 - (g) to weep and wail loudly at intervals at any time after the death of the husband except at ones own volition or involuntary action;
 - (h) to remain in confinement after the death of the husband for any given period;
 - (i) to vacate the matrimonial home;
 - (j) to do any other thing which contravenes the fundamental rights entrenched in the Constitution or is degrading the person.³¹

It is reasoned that this section of the law is lucid enough to make widows ease sigh of relief and make widowhood less burdensome. The law moves on to itemise the offences which are to the effect that;

- (1) It shall be an offence for anyone to;
 - (a) Evict a widow from the family home/ property.
 - (b) Seize not merely household items of the deceased person but also intellectual assets such as pension, share certificates, wills, and life insurance, benefits and entitlements with the aim of disinheriting that widow.
 - (c) (i) Forcefully take away from the widow her children under any guise.
 - (ii) Where the children are taken from the widow, it must be with her consent.
 - (d) (i) Accuse a widow for the death of her husband and punish her arbitrarily without establishing and proving her guilt in a competent court.
 - (ii) Where the guilt of the widow has been proved beyond reasonable doubt, she can only be punished in accordance with the prescribed punishment stipulated by law for the offence for which she was found guilty of.³²

The prescribed punishment for the violation of sections 4 and 5 of the law to the effect that;

Anybody who contravenes, conspires, aids, counsels, procures, or assists another person to contravene the provisions of sections 4 and 5 of this Law shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine of N200,000.00, minimum of ten years imprisonment or both.³³

³⁰ ABRPWL, 2011 section 7.

³¹ *ibid* at section 4.

³² *ibid* at section 5.

³³ *ibid* at section 6.

It is submitted that the fine of ₦200,000.00 is not enough as a punitive measure against violation of the law. The amount should be higher to deter the family and siblings of the widow's late husband from inflicting reprehensible cultural practices on the widow.

c. International Conventions or Treaties Protecting Widows: There are several international instruments to which Nigeria is a signatory whose aim is to protect widows from all forms of reprehensible cultural practices. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) recognises that;

all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in spirit of brotherhood.³⁴

It is suggested that this Article of the Declaration protects the widow from all forms of dehumanization such as cutting the hair of a widow, asking the widow to sleep with the lifeless body of her late husband, compelling a widow to drink a cup of water with which the lifeless body of her late husband was washed among others. Similarly, UDHR provides that 'no one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment,'³⁵ which is a protecting widow from both physical and psychological torture from the siblings and family members of her late husband.

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is another international instrument which specifically addressed women's needs and protects them from all forms of reprehensible cultural practices. CEDAW in its preamble recognizes that discrimination against women abounds and violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity.³⁶ It defines discrimination against women to mean;

any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field.³⁷

Furthermore, CEDAW campaigns against reprehensible cultural practices and advocates for modification of cultural practices to make them friendly in favour of women. It states that;

State parties shall take, appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.³⁸

3. Judicial Authorities That Protect Widows from All Forms of Reprehensible Cultural Practices.

It is imperative to point out that Evidence Act protect widows against cultural practices that are contrary to public policy, reprehensible, repugnant to natural justice, equity and good

³⁴ UDHR Article 1.

³⁵ *ibid* at Article 5.

³⁶ Nwogu (n 6) 87.

³⁷ CEDAW, Article 1.

³⁸ *ibid* at Article 5(a).

conscience.³⁹ It is on the premise of this that this article would consider a handful of judicial authorities that prohibits reprehensible cultural practices against widows.

In the case of *Nzekwu v Nzekwu*⁴⁰ the issue before the Supreme Court was whether a widow who has no issue with her late husband can choose to remain in her late husband's house. The Supreme Court held *inter-alia* that;

A widow who chooses to remain in the husband's house and in his name is entitled in her own right and not withstanding that she has no children to go on occupying the matrimonial home and to be given some share of his farmland for her cultivation and generally to maintenance by her husband's family.

Similarly, in the case of *Mojekwu v Mojekwu*⁴¹ the Court of Appeal struck down as discriminatory, a custom among the Igbos of South-Eastern Nigeria, which allowed the son of the brother of a deceased male person to inherit his property to the exclusion of his female children. It is submitted that the decision in *Mojekwu's case reinforced the CEDAW as a useful convention for widows in Nigeria. Years later, the Supreme Court affirmed the Court of Appeal decision in Mojekwu's case in the case of Ukeje v Ukeje*⁴² where it was held *inter-alia* that;

No matter the circumstances of the birth of a female child is entitled to an inheritance from her late father's estate. Consequently, the Igbo customary law which disentitles a female child from partaking in the sharing of her deceased father's estate is in breach of section 42(1) and (2) of the Constitution, a fundamental rights provision guaranteed to every Nigerian. The said discriminating customary law is void as it conflicts with the section 42(1) and (2) of the Constitution.

4. Reasons behind the Persistency of the Reprehensible Cultural Practices against Widows in Nigeria

As laudable as the legal instruments that protect widows from all forms of reprehensible cultural practices and the judicial pronouncements seem to be, a lot of widows are still facing reprehensible cultural practices in Nigeria. Nigeria is home to about 15 million of the world's 258 million widows⁴³ and over 10 million are subjected to dehumanizing and reprehensible cultural practices. Even though, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, (CFRN) 1999, allow widows to approach High Court to enforce their fundamental right,⁴⁴ many widows often decided not to exploit this opportunity to liberate themselves from such dehumanizing and reprehensible cultural practices.

This article maintains that there are legions of reasons for widows not to liberate themselves from such dehumanizing and reprehensible cultural practices. The reasons include;

a. People's Way of Life: Even though a plethora of statutes, judicial authorities and international instruments are aiding widows in fighting against reprehensible cultural practices, many widows believed it is the way of living that they must comply with to avoid

³⁹ Evidence Act 2011, section 18(3).

⁴⁰ [1989] NWLR (pt 104) 373.

⁴¹ [1997] 7 NWLR (Pt 512) 23; *Mojekwu v Iwuchukwu* [2004] All FWLR (Pt 211) 1406 SC.

⁴² [2014] All FWLR (Pt 730) 1323 SC.

⁴³ *B Onyima* 'Widows in Nigeria are sometimes treated badly: culture is no excuse to violate rights' (22 June 2022) <<https://theconversation.com/widows-in-nigeria-are-sometimes-treated-badly-culture-is-no-excuse-to-violate-rights-184934>> accessed 23 November 2022.

⁴⁴ CFRN, section 46 (1).

any consequences. The implication is that the effectiveness of statutes, judicial authorities and international instruments is at the lowest level in such a society.

- b. Illiteracy:** It is a well-known fact that education is a cure for illiteracy. It, therefore, follows that the higher the educational level the lower the illiteracy level. It is, however, becomes a thing of concern that the illiteracy level among widows in Nigeria is high to the extent that a greater number of them do not know that there are statutes provisions, judicial authorities and international instruments that protect them against all forms of reprehensible cultural practices.
- c. Widow's Fear of Consequences of Refusing to Adhere to Cultural Practices:** Although statutory provisions, judicial authorities and international instruments protect them against all forms of reprehensible cultural practices, many widows believe that rejecting or neglecting to accept any form of reprehensible cultural practices imposed on them would attract everlasting consequences. Such consequences they believe include not having access to her demised husband's properties, facing the wrath of gods, expose to curses from the deity of her demised husband's family, societal ex-communication and so on. When a widow considered these, she often bows to pressure and risks being exposed to reprehensible cultural practices which in most cases ended with physical and psychological torture.
- d. Widow's Fear of Late Husband's Family:** Often time, a widow is unwilling to kowtow to any form of reprehensible cultural practices. However, due to pressure from her late husband's family, she would concede to any form of reprehensible cultural practices which often include sleeping with the lifeless body of her late husband to allow his spirit to rest, proving to the family that she knows nothing about the death of her late husband, swearing or drinking a locally made concoction before herbalist or deity to affirm her innocent from the death of her late husband and so on. The family often infuse fear in the widow that her failure to comply with all the cultural practices could result in madness or death for her. As revealed in this article, there are legions of statutory provisions and international instruments which a widow could seek refuge under but due to fear from her late husband's family, she would accept her fate and becomes a victim of reprehensible cultural practices.
- e. Widow's Fear of What Would Happen to Her Children If Refused.** The responsibility of bringing up the children of the marriage morally, academically, emotionally, culturally and so on falls squarely on a widow now that their father is late. It is on the premises of ensuring that the children are safe that a widow would do all prescribed cultural practices, whether it is reprehensible or not so long her children are well protected. It is worthy of note that a widow at that point is less concerned about the existence of any statutory provisions or international instruments which protect her. All that matters is how her children would be safe following the demise of her husband.

5. Conclusion

This article dissects reprehensible cultural practices against widows in Nigeria and reveals statutory provisions at the National and the State level which serve as the fulcrum for widows in Nigeria. It proceeds to discuss international instruments that widows could leverage as protection against reprehensible cultural practices. The study elucidates on reasons behind the persistence of reprehensible cultural practices against widows despite the availability of statutory provisions and international instruments.

It is the responsibility of all stakeholders to ensure that widows are well protected because they are vulnerable human beings that are experiencing all forms of psychological torture due to the demise of the love of their lives. Unleashing reprehensive cultural practices on them makes their natural injury of losing their husbands a worse part of their lives and capable of regretting contributing to reproduction by way of marriage.

6. Recommendations

It is imperative to treat widows not only with respect but as women and mothers, hence the following recommendations;

- a. ***Government Education and Information for the Widows:*** As noted in this article, there are plethora of laws at the national, States level and at international which widows could leverage for protection upon the demised of their husbands. It now beholds the government at the national and state levels to educate widows on their existence and inform them on how to apply them to avoid being shortchanged upon the demised of their husbands. This could be achieved through the Ministry of Women's Affairs either at the National level or at the State level.
- b. ***Activities of the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO):*** There are non-governmental Organisations such as the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS), *Federacion Internacional de Abogadas* (FIDA) or International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) and so on that are committed to the welfare of widows in Nigeria. This article recommends that the NGO go beyond the elementary state of attending to widows' needs but aggressively focus on turning around the lives of widows through public seminars, workshops, talk shows, TV Programmes, distribution of leaflets, town meetings, visitations and so on. It is opined that when all these are in place, widows would not only know their rights under statutory provisions and international instruments but also know when and how to enforce them.
- c. ***Writing of Will to Mitigate Hardship for the Widows:*** Widows especially those that contracted customary marriage must ensure that their husband writes Will during his lifetime to reduce the risk of reprehensible cultural practices in the area of inheritance which they might be exposed to upon the demised of their husband. Moreover, widows that contracted statutory marriage under Marriage Act should also ensure that their husband makes Will and where their late husband did not make a Will, they should immediately contact a legal practitioner or Ministry of Justice or Ministry of Women Affairs for appropriate advice to avoid reprehensible cultural practices in the area of inheritance.
- d. ***Activities of the Cooperative Societies:*** Women are often involved in cooperative societies to aid themselves or their husbands. It follows that before the demised of their husbands, they are well used to group association in form of cooperative societies. It is, therefore, advised that leadership of the societies should encourage widows to speak out on any hardship or dehumanizing or reprehensible cultural practices they are facing to help them contact appropriate government agencies such as the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Women Affairs and so on for aid.
- e. ***Activities of Churches or Mosques.*** Nigeria as one of the most religious countries on earth has women as the largest number of followers. In the same vein, these religious organisations have welfare packages which most widows are leveraging when facing reprehensible cultural practices. It is recommended that churches and Mosques should concentrate more on empowering widows, and training the children of the widows to solidify their future, thereby reducing societal vices. Additionally, religious originations should also join the government to condemn all forms of reprehensible cultural practices toward widows and sensitize widows among their congregations on the need to open up and be fearless in standing up against such reprehensible cultural practices as God, Church or Mosques and Government are behind them.