

Maltreatment of Widow in Ekiti State, Nigeria - Implication for Counselling

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Abstract:

This paper examines the maltreatment of widows in sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria, Ekiti state in particular. A widow could be regarded as a woman whose husband has died. Despite the advancement in standard of living, widows are still experiencing hard lifestyle after the death of their husbands. These include human right violations, deprivation of liberty, acquisition of witchcraft, denial of access to husbands' properties, economic hardship, wicked traditional beliefs and practices, sexual assaults, forced marriages and discrimination of all kinds to mention a few. These experiences of varied forms of maltreatments have been resulting to poor mental and physical well-being of victims, even affecting the lives of those children left behind by the deceased. The population consisted of all widows in Ekiti State, Nigeria. A sample of 50 widows aged between 20-50 and 50 and above were selected from five Local Governments areas in Ekiti State for the study. A questionnaire titled "Maltreatment of Widows Questionnaire" was used to elicit information on the subject from the respondents. The instrument validity and the reliability of the instrument was ensured. The data collected were analysed using student's t-test to test the hypotheses raised at 0.05 level of significance. The results showed that age has a significant relationship with widow's maltreatment while it was also discovered that traditional beliefs significantly influence widows maltreatment, whereas traditional practices do not. Based on these findings, it was recommended that all the irrational and injurious cultural beliefs about widows should be stopped and there should be freedom of choice for any

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widow that wishes to remarry particularly the younger ones. The properties left behind by the deceased should be inherited by the widow and the children, not the family members.

Keywords: widow, maltreatment, inheritance, women, decease, culture, Ekiti State,

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1. INTRODUCTION

A widow could be referred to as a legally married woman whose husband has died and who has not married again. This description is also in line with Collins dictionary and with Agunwa (2011) who opined that a widow is a married woman who has been deprived of her legal husband as a result of death. In the perspective of Asward (1967), it was stressed that a widow is a woman whose husband has died and left without husband. He further explained that the term widowhood is the state or period of being a widow. From these definitions, it could be understood that a widow is a woman whose legal husband has died and remain unmarried except she wishes to remarry. Similarly, a widow is a grieved soul that needs compassion and unconditional love as stressed by Manala (2015) which opined that Christian communities preach unconditional love in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth of which they themselves do not implement. This is because the unconditional love supposed to reduce or alleviate the pains caused by the loss of the husband.

Furthermore, it was reported by Oniye (1995) that the death, especially that of a very close person like ones husband, is often seen as an ultimate loss which invariably is accompany by grief. As observed by the researchers in Nigerian communities, this category of women seemed to be victimized and oppressed, even denied of their husband's belongings not minding their well-being and that of the decease children, coupled with the acquisition of killing their husbands. No wonder Owen (2001) found negative and painful statements by the victims from some developing countries like Nigeria, such as acquisition of being a witch who killed the husband, being treated like animal, being beaten and kicked out of their residence by in-laws. This is despite the fact that the care of the widow is supposed to be a must, they should be honoured and treated with compassion. Widow's experiences in Ekiti State was contrary to this unconditional positive regards due to the diverse maltreatments imposed on them. These maltreatments has been resulting to abject poverty, ill-health, truncation of their children education, homelessness, psychological imbalanced, isolation and untimely death in most cases.

Widow's maltreatment referred to a situation in which a widow is unfairly treated as slave by the deceased family members which could be regarded as a form of gender based violence. Gender based violence is a term used to describe the harms inflicted upon individuals particularly women that is connected to normative understanding of their gender through harmful customs and traditional practices. Report has shown that one third of women globally have experienced one form of gender based violence or the other. This is contrary to the teaching of the Bible where God commanded that widows should be considered part of the covenantal community, that same merciful protection that they bestowed orphans and defenceless people should be extended to them.

In Nigerian society, particularly in Ekiti State, majority of the widows and their children are likely to be helpless and lacks adequate care. No wonder why God said that He will afflict anyone that afflicted widows. Manala (2015) in his study on African traditional widowhood rites opined that, in the footsteps of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Christians communities preached unconditional love, especially for the poor, marginalized and

vulnerable people, the implementation of which however grossly lacking in respect of the treatment of widows. He stressed further that there is an apparent deliberate, uncaring, disrespecting, discriminating, impolite and unjust treatment of widows in African community of which Ekiti State is not exempted.

The measure of maltreatment inflicted on widows seemed to be having great effect on victims that were still very young, physically, financially and emotionally particularly those whose husbands are the sole provider of the family. Even when those that belongs to working class still suffered and find it difficult to cope, one can imagine the situation of those that do not. In line with the above statement, Adeyemo (2014) in a study on assessing the effects of widowhood on children education, established that a lot of problems facing widows can be resolved if they are gainfully employed. Other noticeable factor could probably be due to the interest and contention of the deceased siblings and relatives to inherit them as wife after the death of their husbands against their interest which is culturally accepted based on the cultural believe and practices. This practice seemed to be extended to other countries like Uganda, Kenya, where the deceased assets is managed by the nephews on her mother's side, the woman will only be left with two options, either to marry the heir of the family or returned to her own family leaving the children with their father's family members.

The cultural practices of Ekiti people seems to culminate widow's maltreatment. The moment the husband of a woman dies in Ekiti State; his dead body calls for morning by the wife. Immediately, she will be summoned to a room by an old woman from the husband's family where she will be mandated to sit on the floor, in some situations, she may be allowed to use mat. All her other activities will be suspended and her movement will be restricted to the room. She will remained in this condition until the late husband is buried. After the burial of the late husband the widow will now enter into another period of mourning for another one year, throughout this period she must be in complete black dress, bear footed, she will not be allowed to put on neither sleepers, shoes nor Sanders, she will be instructed to cut her nails and hair, and not to change her dresses or bath herself. She will be mandated to wear only a particular dress and the type of cloth to wear must not be attractive. It must be either black or deep blue. If there is need to go to the toilet, she must not go alone, someone must accompany her. The victim will be subjected to all these practices without considering her health status, welfare and that of the children. If the widow refused to comport herself by the instruction given, she will be frustrated and exposed to untold bitterness. Although, some scholars like Makatu et al (2008), perceived benefits in widowhoods rites and practices such as healing, believing that since death has a negative impacts on the remaining persons' lives, rituals are considered to have therapeutic values that assists the griever in moving on with her life. This seems to be so in Ekiti State. Although the problems range from obnoxious legislation which subdue women under male dominance to cultural practices and disinheritance (Kamatikibiu, 2017).

As observed by the researchers, Ekiti people cultural belief is one of the factors that aggravate widow's maltreatment. It is believed that widows must be separated from the husband spiritually and must physically cut her nails and shave her hairs. The cutting of the

woman's hair denoted that the husband that used to admire the hair is dead, thus it means that no one will appreciate her hair do any longer. Ekiti people do not believe in natural death, especially in the cases of husband and wife. For instance, whenever a man dies the wife will be attached to his death claiming that she is the one responsible for the death of her husband. The death of the man will be traced to a situation or a person, mostly the wife of the deceased to be accused of the man's death and this will expose her to many trials and afflictions. Another cultural belief of Ekiti people about widow is that she is part of the husbands belongings that needs to be shared with other properties and must not be allowed to move out from the family to marry any other man outside the family of the deceased. She will be expected to be inherited by one of the deceased relatives, if refused - she will be frustrated. All the properties of the husband must be withdraw from her and likely to be chased out form the husband residence. After all, it was believe that all the properties of the deceased should be owned by the family of the deceased.

It is also believe that widow needs to be purged by having sexual intercourse from the deceased family or the town cleanser which could result to health related problem such as acquiring of sexually transmitted diseases. These maltreatments had been resulting to ill-health as a result of the denial of access to health care, lack of conducive abode in most cases. Other effects include financial restrains that could lead to malnutrition of the deceased children and the truncation of their education, exposure to diverse sexual violence and lack of freedom that could culminate to physical and psychological effects of the widow. This has been a concern for some scholars even before now, like Kaori (2007), who maintained that there should be support for widowed women and their children not minding the psychosocial concerns of the community as the cause of the terrible and dehumanizing widowhood rites that ignores the concern for justice. Also, it does not consider equality, human rights and human dignity that activists against inhuman widowhood practices speaking for the security of his masculinity. It is now obvious that widows are greatly maltreated based on the above background that depict the degree of the suffering, thus there is need for international sensitivity so as to find probable solution to the problem.

1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is obvious based on the facts gendered from above and personal observation that widows in Nigeria, particularly those in Ekiti State have suffered by their in-laws due to the cultural believes and practices and gender imbalances. This kind of treatments has been resulting to ill- health, physical, emotional, financial and psychological problems for these widows due to the lack of concern of the in-laws that ought to sustain the widow and the children with love and care to reduce the pain caused by the death of the husband. Instead bitterness is the answer if the widow refused to dance to their wishes, most especially the young widows. All the belongings of the late husband will be acquired by the family members, leaving the wife and the children to suffer. Children education will be truncated, poor feeding and lack of access to health care. Based on the above, there is need for the cultural and behavioural change among people of Ekiti State.

2.1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to proffer probable solutions to the maltreatments of widows in Ekiti State that will enhance cultural and behavioural change.

2. METHODOLOGY

Three research questions were used for the study and the design used for the study was the descriptive of the survey type. . The respondents consisted of all the widows in Ekiti State. A sample of fifty widows was purposively selected for the study through simple random sampling techniques. A questionnaire titled "maltreatment of widows" was used to collect data for the study. The data collected was analysed using students t-test for the hypotheses generated at 0.05 level of significance.

2.1. Correlations

Table 1. There is no significant relationship between traditional beliefs and widow's maltreatment.

Note: N = numbers of respondents, S.D = Standard Deviation, and r = correlation coefficient

Variables	N	Mean	S.D	r	p-value	Remark
Traditional Beliefs	44	4.88	0.321	0.369	0.014	Significant
Widows Maltreatment	44	3.81	1.588			

Table 1 shows correlation coefficient, $r = 0.369$, $p = 0.014$ at 0.05 level of significance. Since 0.014 p-value is less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is not accepted. This implies that, there is significant relationship between traditional beliefs and widow's maltreatment.

Table 2. - There is no significant relationship between traditional practices and widow's maltreatment.

Variables	N	Mean	S.D	r	p-value	Remark
Traditional Practice	44	4.86	0.347	0.207	0.178	Not
Widows Maltreatment	44	3.81	1.588			Significant

Table 2 indicates that $r = 0.207$, $p = 0.178$ at 0.05 level of significance. Since 0.178 p-value is more than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is accepted. This implies that, there is no significant relationship between traditional practice and widow's maltreatment.

Table 3.- Age has no significant influence on widow's maltreatment.

Source	SS	Df	MS	F	P-value	Remark
Between Groups	57.366	2	28.683	23.062	0.000	Significant
Within Groups	49.750	40	1.244			
Total	107.116	42				

SS=Sum of Squares, DF= Degrees of Freedom, MS=Mean Square, F=F-Ratio (variation among groups)

Table 3 shows that $F=23.062$, $p<0.05$. The null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that age has significant influence on widow's maltreatment. In order to locate the point of difference, Post Hoc Multiple Comparisons was carried out as shown in table 4.

Table 4. Post Hoc Multiple Comparisons

(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Standard Error	P-value
Below 40 years	41 — 55 years	1.05000*	0.35267	0.018
	56 years above	4.60000*	0.69049	0.000
41 — 55 years	Below 40 years	-1.05000*	0.35267	0.018
	56 years above	3.55000*	0.69049	0.000
56 years above	Below 40 years	-4.60000*	0.69049	0.000
	41 — 55 years	-3.55000*	0.69049	0.000

The above table indicates that there is difference between the maltreatment of widows on age below 40 years and 41-55 years as well as among those above 56 years. Similarly, the result further revealed that widows of 41-55 years are more maltreated than older widows beyond 56 years.

3. FINDINGS / DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that there is positive and significant relationship between traditional beliefs and widow's maltreatment. It was also found in the study that there is no significant relationship between traditional practice and widow's maltreatment. This implies that the more traditional beliefs is being uphold the tendency for widows to be maltreated. Furthermore, it was indicated in the findings that age has significant influence on widow's maltreatment. Widows under 40 years of age received maltreatments than those of age 41-55 years and 56 years above. This implies that widows of young age received the heat of maltreatment than those who are old because their children may be too young to defend them.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that traditional believes influence widows maltreatment, whereas traditional practices do not. It was also concluded that widows below age 40 years old were more maltreated than those above 56 years old. Based on the result, the following recommendations were made.

- a. Traditional practises that are harmful should be eroded.
- b. Widows that are still young and wishes to remarry should be allowed to do so.
- c. Government and legal practitioners should formulate laws that will support the release of widower's property to the widow and her children.
- d. There should be laws debasing widow's maltreatment with appropriate punishment.
- e. Nigerian societies should be educated about the erroneous believes of attaching the death of the late husbands to their wives.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

The concern of counsellors is the behavioural change of which is relevant to this study. The findings of this study revealed a significant relationship between cultural practices and believes which is an indication that cultural practices and believes aggravates widow s suffering. The kind of maltreatment received from the in-laws has been resulting to physical, emotional, financial and psychological problems. In this case, the counsellor can organise a meeting with the elders in Ekiti State to look into those believes and the cultural practices that influenced widow's maltreatment for a change in other to make life better for the widows and their children. More so, the study also revealed a relationship between widows and their age such that young widows do suffered because of the deceased family's interest in inheriting them as part of the late husband property. This kind of contention could lead to more maltreatments for the widow if nothing is done to erode such believe. The counsellor can organize a seminal for Ekiti people to educate them on this issue.

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