

Exploration of Social Milieu Surrounding Widower/Widowhood in Nigeria Cultural Setting

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Abstract

The study examined, social milieu surrounding widower and widowhood practices in cultural setting in Nigeria. The inhuman treatment experienced by widower and widow varies from one culture to the other. In some culture, subjecting the widow to four months house arrest to detect possibility of pregnancy is regarded as a favour of clemency for the widow. The influence of western education and Christianity is now modifying the rate at which widows and their children are being forced to comply with their cultural rites. In this study, discussion and interview with focus group were used for data collection. Fifteen individuals were sampled for focus group discussion while five widows, five widowers and five children were selected from three states representing Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba tribes in Nigeria, making a total of 54 respondents. Data collected were analyzed using content analyses and presented thematically. It is interesting to discover that different widowhood practices and rites are still in existence in some towns and remote areas in the three geographical zones of Nigeria, while some widower experienced victimization from the relatives of their late wives. However, due increased civilization, westernization, right awareness and embracement of Christianity, general societal attitude to widows and widowers had improved in recent past. The contributions from individuals, philanthropists, professional social workers and religious organizations had alleviated the societal discrimination being faced by widows and widowers in the Nigerian society. The government therefore need to corroborate the contributions of different organizations in alleviating the social milieu of widowhood by enacting laws against inhumane treatment widows are made to go through and also forming policies that will ensure formal education for affected children.

Keywords: Exploration, social milieu, widower, widowhood, children, cultural setting

Introduction

Adult education plays important roles at improving the lives of individuals, groups and the society. While social welfare being an aspect of adult education examine and see to the welfare of individual in the society. The term adult is often associated with maturity and responsibility. Since an adult is expected to be responsible, he or she is therefore expected to have the right to participate as a responsible home maker, worker and member of a society. Social responsibility requires that an adult must be committed to his family, village or community, social organizations or clubs by making his own contributions as and when due. The contributions individual make are at times influenced by ones culture. Nzeneri (2008) opined someone can be referred to be an adult when the person is matured psychologically and physically and the person is responsible politically, economically and socially in the community he belong to. All these values are expected to be seen in an individual in each Nigerian immediate and extended family. Nigeria could be viewed according to her three major ethnic groups. These are the Hausas in the Northern part of the country, the Igbos in the South East and the Yorubas occupying the Southwestern part. The three major tribes speak different languages, although there is a common lingua franca which is English language imbibed from the British who colonized the country in 1963. Although, the country is termed to be one, but has different cultures which is affecting her social lives. The country has over 250 tribes/ethnic groups while there are over 521 languages that are being spoken in Nigeria.

Marriage is one of the social lives being affected by peoples' cultural background. The culture has it that women are subjected to some practices after the death of their husbands, so also with men. Widower and widowhood are cases that crop up within a family. Thus widower and widowhood are having some practices which will either make lives convenient or difficult for them after the death of one member in a marriage. Thus, the paper is particular about social milieu of widower and widowhood which is an aspect of adult education. Culture could be described as the guiding principles of human behavior and existence as transmitted by a society. Some rites are done after the death of the husband of a woman, referred to as widowhood rites. Korieh (1996) explained the

rites observed by widows as steps to be taken by her and the behavior of members of the society to these widows, while rituals were performed on behalf of the widow from the time on the death of her husband. A widower might not be asked to observe some rites but could experience the unexpected from the relatives of his late wife.

From indications, Nigeria is a country of different people with different complex cultural background when it comes to institution of marriage. Widows are highly marginalized by the Nigerian society due to cultural factors. The decisions of members of extended families count a lot when it comes to widower and widowhood. There is no particular age whether one is young or old by which one could become widower or widow in Nigeria. This is as a result of cases of untimely or unexpected death involving males and females that is rampant in the society. Untimely death could be attributed to incessant bombing of the Islamic Boko Haram in the north central and north eastern part of the country; invasion of Fulani herdsmen in various parts of the country; kidnapping for rituals, oil bunkering resulting in pipeline explosion leading to the death of many people; plane crash; vital motor accidents; motor cycle accident; community clashes; collapsing of buildings; fire outbreak; flood disaster; beheading people while propagating their religious faith; military invasion on communities; armed robbers invasion; cultists invasion in communities, kidnapping resulting in loss of lives.

A person could also become a widower or widow when a woman is passing through the pains of child delivery; sicknesses like HIV/AIDS, Malaria, outbreak of epidemic diseases like Cholera, Ebola; while some children lose either of the parents in cases of husband slaughtering wife or wife killing the husband. Culture plays a lot in every aspect of peoples' activities in Nigeria like dressing, eating, dancing, burial, naming ceremony, wedding ceremony, house building, birth, kingship, chieftaincy, planting and harvesting, death, while religion and culture are interwoven. According to Onyenuchie (1999), the practice of widowhood rites could be the consequence of low perception of women; society where men dominate women; inactiveness of female; religion; laws of the land on marriage and inheritance; females from the same family cosmology; gender sightlessness, poverty and illiteracy.

There are different widowhood rites experienced by women across different ethnic groups in Nigeria. Olakitike (2009) expressed many of the widowhood practices violate women's human right, while these widowhood performances vary from one country to another. Yet, women go through these painful rites without complaining due to the shock and grief of their dead husbands. Women endured to prove their innocence of their husband's death and not to be harmed by the spirit of the dead husbands. Oyeniya, Aransiola and Ayodeji (2010) on the other hand are of the view that it becomes vital if these widowhood rites have genuine reasons for observing them, it is also necessary for men to prove they are innocent of the death of their wives no matter the circumstances that surround their death. It is disheartening to observe that within the same society, women are accused of killing their husbands while men would be pitied and be given wives immediately. We should ask these questions why our society has refused to protect men from their dead wives' spirit by observing some rites to separate the spirit of the living husbands from their dead wives' spirit. The attitude of widowhood in Nigerian culture against widower is a reflection of African mentality of women being inferior to men, whereby women would be treated as the society decide.

1.1. Societal Posture to Widower and Widowhood in Nigeria

According to Yvonne D. and Browning C. (2002), expressed are of the view that many widowers and widows experience hardship at the initial stage of the death of their partners as these people pass through repeated thinking about their deceased partners, experience sleepless nights and dejection. Nwosu (2007), expressed that restriction in movement at the initial stage is more on widows than on widowers when their wives died, while widows also experience pains. The wives immediately becomes the first suspect for their husbands' death. In Yoruba land, the man is always given or allowed to take another wife as soon as possible to comfort him upon the loss of his wife with the belief that it is not good that he should be sleeping alone.

Widows are subjected to inhuman treatment in traditional ritual rites and practices such as solitary confinement, defacement, disinheritance, and long mourning period preventing her from engaging in economic activities. The effects are poverty, acute stress and depression, prevention from social outings, loss of identity and self-esteem. Baobal (2002) reiterated the condition of widowhood has rendered women to health associated problems like HIV/AIDS and some other diseases, so also financial, sexual, psychological, social and physical abuse. Widower could also experience poverty if the dead wife was the bread winner of the family, he could experience mitigation from the wife's family if there had been constant quarrel in their family before the death of the

woman, and this could result in loneliness, hunger, neglect and diseases like high blood pressure or stroke for the widower.

The harmful widowhood practices in Nigeria, attracted the attention of a one-time Senate President, Mark, (2013) tried to ensure the passage of a 'Bill on the prohibition of violence against persons' by Nigerian National Assembly. He was interested in stopping violence in particular domestic and violence against women in their private and public endeavour. In Africa and Nigeria society in particular, widowhood is having adverse effects on women's health. Health effects indicate being able to function mentally, socially, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Due to pressure from families, many widows for the rest of their lives do not enjoy good health, as they find it difficult to express their feelings (Egbo & Boye).

Looking at widowhood practices in the Eastern part of Nigeria, especially in Uzo Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State, it was observed that it takes the wives of kings seven years to mourn the king's death which would be before they were buried in addition to one year moving after the king's human rights burial, showing the violation of women fundamental human rights due to cultural adherence (Emeka et al, 2016). In Anambra State, a widow could be in secluded area ranging from 10 months to two years. Despite the fact that widows would not take their bath for about three weeks, they would later go to a river to bath, the widow being in company of some women and were not expected to be seen by men. The widow will have to swear at the river in order to identify if she had killed her husband, this will be followed by shaving of her hair. A widow may not be allowed to attend the burial ceremony of her husband if there were crisis in the family before his death. Today, Christianity is changing most of these cultural practices among the people.

1.2. Inheritance vis-a vis widower and widowhood in Nigerian culture.

According to Oneyenuchie (1998), widows, after their husbands had been buried may experience being inherited by the next of kin of their late husband or their heir, thus being subjected to emotional and annoying condition. Any widow that refuses these inheritance rights may be denied coming in contact with her children. Also, among the Ashanti of Ghana, in order to show the dead husband had been given a befitting burial, wife inheritance is considered the appropriate thing by strictly observing this widowhood rites. Okoye (1995), noted observing these rites of widowhood in Ghana result to widows experiencing emotional violence. The properties of the widow's late husband are taken away from her without considering her situation and the circumstances by which she had worked with her late husband to acquire their wealth.

In Cameroon, Okoye (1995) found out that observing widowhood rite is a painful experience, while the wife is always the suspect of the death of the husband. Properties of the husband's widow are always taken away from her without considering her situation which may make life difficult for her. Some widows could be sent away after collecting all their properties like fallow land, farmland, houses where they are living, cars and shops. In some situations, some widows will feed on little gifts received from friends, their own relatives, religious groups where they worship or charity groups. This may happen for some months after the death of the husband, while some widows may be fortunate to get philanthropists to sponsor one or two of their children in school.

Olurode (1990) also on inheritance asserted that in a case where the new husband of the widow already had wives, these wives should not object the arrival of their husband's new wife, and if this new wife had no male child for her late husband, she also has no right to inherit any of her late husband's properties. According to the Legal Research and Resources Development Centre (1995), among the Ibos in Nigeria, as soon as the period of mourning is over which is normally twelve (12) months, the widow is open to offer for marriage from members of the deceased's family, usually the first son or the younger brother. If the widow was the dead only wife or their mother, then the deceased uncle or younger brother or the nearest kin inherits her. If the diseased had so many wives, the heir could pick the younger and more beautiful one, give some to his younger brothers and request those he did not want in the family to refund the dowry on them and are free to go away.

In Yoruba land, when a man died, and in the absence of an elderly son, his brother or male relations will collect everything belonging to the dead man's relative not minding whether it was acquired through the joint effort of the widow and the dead relative. Boparai (1995), noted most marriages in Nigeria are governed by customary laws, a wife has absolutely no right to the income or properties of her husband. Citing Nwezi(1989), the relatives of the dead man demanded from the widow the man's properties' documents like investments, land, and bank accounts. So also among the Igbo people of Nigeria, Nzewi (1981) found that the relatives asked for the deceased properties pertaining to documents on investments, bank accounts and land. In order to assure that these documents were not hidden by the widow, she would be asked to take an oath on these properties. Emeka et al (2016) further reiterated that when considering widowhood and widower practices in Imufu community of

Enugu State, women mourn for one month while in Abia State, the period of mourning had been reduced to six or three months from one year. The major problem after a loved person's death in these communities is a widow having access to the properties of her dead husband. It has led the children and the widow leaving the house of their family. Things are always difficult for widows and widowers as they are always faced with economic recession which Investopedia (2017) defined as a significant decline in an activity across the economy, lasting longer than a few months, these people can experience economic hardship for years.

1.3. Family attitude to widower and widow

Most widows are exposed to extortion and oppression meted on them by their dead partner's relatives. According to Ethel (2012), widows in Nigeria are exposed to several widowhood practices and cultural taboos that are tremendously degrading and domineering. These widowhood observance include being made to swear with the husband's corps, rubbing on charcoal; dancing round the town with a black dress; not being allowed to eat; staying at home for 40 days according to Muslim rites; not sleeping during the day; sleeping on the floor; not plaiting hair; shaving of hair; keeping hair for seven days, not bathing; wearing black material and staying indoors

In support of this, Erinosh (2000), narrated the widow may be forced to swear before a family shrine and or drink water that has been used to wash the corpse in order to prove her innocence. It is believed that any of these measures can be used to detect if the widow is a culprit and will be punished, but if not will be freed. The United Nations General Assembly, 1981; UNICEF, 1998 asserted that a widow is to eat kola nut placed on the dead body of the deceased, making her to eat from a particular plate with her left hand for the period of mourning, making her to go into the distant bush alone in the dark during the mourning period, to expose her naked outside the house both morning and evening, to sleep with the dead body of the deceased husband, dispossessing them of property or disinheritance, forced out from matrimonial home and forced to wail incessantly to remorse and grief.

Nwezi (1989), noted the widow is required to provide expensive items, including a white goat and two jars of palm wine for purification purpose to the female members of their husband's lineage who made and implemented decision on every matter concerning widows, also, found out that fines were imposed on widows by female members of their husband's patrilineage. Emery (2003), noted among the Hausa-Fulani community tainted with Islamic religious element, mourning and purification rites are also imposed and adhered to. A Muslim widow in Kano undergoes a four (4) –month mourning period and observes reasonable number of days in seclusion. In Plateau and Bauchi states, Muslim widows observe 40 days of mourning and 30 days of seclusion which run concurrently. Children of widower and widow fare differently in Nigerian culture. Many homes experience poverty. The implications on children are always withdrawal of children from school, engaging in exploitative informal work, engaging children in child labour, hawking, begging along the street if a female may be a victim of rape.

Tasie (2013) noted widows are of the view that after the death of the head and breadwinner of the family, the importance of widowhood rites is to solidify the widow in order to prepare her for the task ahead, catering or continuing the responsibility left by the head dead husband. This will make her to be brave and courageous to cope with the life of self-reliance she had to start. Stillion (1998), stressed when a man dies, the widow will experience loss of self-esteem, while her social status will be largely reduced. Ohansi (1994) stated widows usually transit from relative luxury to poverty when their husbands' relative deprive them of all assets they have toiled with to acquire in spite of the widows' cooperative attitudes with their husbands during their life time. Leonard, (1975), and Group of Philippine Organizers (1974), stressed in social work, the goal of empowerment is facilitated by the process of conscientisation through which people in unfavorable situations are assisted to attain a serious and deep awareness.

1.4. How children fare under widow and widowhood practices

It was observed among the Yoruba culture of Nigeria that some relatives of the deceased without discussing with the widow acquired the dead man's land, packed all his properties, while the widow was left to continue her normal life with her children, claiming she will be the only person that will be able to take proper care of these children. Falana, Ajayi & Falana (2017) observed the aged, orphans and widows now look at members of their immediate families for financial assistance due to the present economy in Nigeria biting hard on them. It was also observed that some relatives of the dead women came to the widowers to demand for the properties of their

dead wives. Many children find it difficult to continue their studies after the death of their fathers or mothers. Life always become unbearable for children after their fathers' relatives might have acquired their fathers' properties. Some children experience hardship if their mothers' sources of income are not able to meet their social and economic demands. According to Onyenuchie (1999), In Edo state, after the period of mourning, widows are subjected to psychological frustrating experience or process of being inherited by their heir or next of kin of their late husband. Any attempt at rejecting such an offer attracts total ostracization from her husband's family and even withdrawal or limited access to their children. Osimiri (1990) asserted young children of widows are being forced to drop out of school, work, and become destitute due to lack of access to their father's resources.

1.5. Opinions of widower and widow on their pains

Considering the opinions of widower and widow on their pains, according to Osakwe (1995), widows claimed in order to demonstrate their non-complicity in their husband's death which could be assumed by the family to be as a result of their acts of adultery or have made use of deadly charms or witchcraft they have to comply with the rites. Therefore widowhood's rites were accepted and observed so that their husband's relatives will not neglect but continue to accept them, and decided to adhere to widowhood's rites in accordance with their culture to protect them from being hunted by their late husband's spirit. In support of Osakwe (1996), Saba (1997) revealed that widows indicated these rites are accepted as normal requirements of their widowhood status, as most women who went through the various rites failed to see anything bad in these rites. This was buttressed by Onyemuchie (2007) that the typical African woman does not feel that her womanhood has been violated by observing widowhood rites.

1.6. Social welfare perspective at improving social milieu of widow and widower

Social work seeks to identify and eradicate all forms of fundamental harassment, also to try to bring about social, cultural, political and economic empowerment of its clients. Krysk and Finn (2007) observed that social workers are required to use research as instrument to improve people's social conditions and to enhance the profession's scientific status. Four functions of social work research were highlighted by these writers: Enhancing access to resources which can be used to help their clientele; facilitating information gathering; promoting and effective communication; promoting the scientific method as a way of knowing and increasing accountability through programme evaluation. Farley, O. and Smith, L. (2006) also stressed that the services of social work provided for the public are child welfare, drug abuse; work place; public welfare; corrections; rehabilitation; the school; marriage and family counselling; medical and psychiatry. Farley *et al.* (2006) further stressed that the services of social work extended to national and international levels apart from focusing on the needs and problems at the persona, family and the neighbourhood levels. Thus, social workers provide extensive diversity of social services to meet peoples' social needs or alleviate social problems. Rwomire, A (2011) claimed that social casework involves working with the client to measure and recognize the needs and strengths of individual and family; develop a case plan to provide appropriate services and support; implement the case plan using community resources; implement the case plan to provide appropriate services and support; evaluate client progress and the case plan to determine continued need for services; co-ordinate and monitor the provision of services.

The purpose of this study is to examine the social milieu surrounding widower and widowhood in Nigeria cultural setting, and suggest possible ways of reducing the inhuman practices as well as create awareness on the negative effects of these social milieu on the widower, widow and their children, and social welfare perspectives at improving their social milieu.

2. The objectives of this study are to:

- enumerate societal posture to widower and widow in Nigerian culture.
- examine inheritance vis-à-vis widower and widowhood in Nigerian culture.
- examine the attitude of close families of widower and widow.
- identify how children fare under widower and widowhood.
- identify the opinions of widower and widow on their pains.

- explore social welfare perspective at improving social milieu of widowers and widows in Nigerian culture.

2.1. Research Questions

The following questions guided this research:

- What has been the societal posture to widower and widowhood practices in Nigerian culture?
- What has been the practice of Nigerians on inheritance of the properties of the dead?
- What are the attitudes of close families of widow and widower?
- How do children fare under widow and widowhood?
- What are the opinions of widows and widower on their pains?
- What are social welfare perspective at improving social milieu of widow and widower in Nigeria?

2.2. Research Methods

This study was carried out among widowers and widows from the three major tribes in Nigeria, These were Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Data were collected through qualitative technique by making use of Interview and Focus Group Discussion with the participants. Random sampling was used in the selection of the states and the participants. Osun state among the Yorubas, Kano to represent Hausa and Imo to represent Igbo people. For focus group discussion, five (5) participants from each state making a total of fifteen (6 and 9 respectively) widowers and widows were involved. Interviews were conducted after a random sampling for three (3) widowers, five (5) widows and five (5) children of widower or widows from each of the three states, making a total of nine (9) widowers, fifteen (15) widows and fifteen (15) children experiencing social milieu of death. The total population for the study was fifty four (54). Data collected were analysed using content analysis.

3. Results

3.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

The socio-demographic characteristics of the widowers, widows and their children revealed that many men and women lose their partners at their tender ages, while some children lost either of their parents while they were still young. Research revealed 25 out of the 39 participants were below the age of 50 when they lost their partners, while 10 out of the 15 children who participated in this study lost either of their parents while in Secondary school education. Different factors contributed to the death of these men and women. Some people died as a result of sickness, sudden death as a result of Low or High Blood Pressure, communal clashes, motor accident, and barrenness.

Most of the widows and widowers (23 out of 39) had higher institution certificates, while most of the widows and widowers (30 out of 39) have four (4) children, with eight having five or six children and only one widower had no child from the late wife. Out of the 24 widows that participated, only one of them got married again, while others

preferred taking care of their children. Majority of the participants were Christians (45 out of 54), while the rest were Muslims, despite their religious faith, they still observed some of the traditional religious rites. Out of these 39 widowers and widows, most of them are business men and women despite the fact that some are still civil servants.

3.2. Interaction with the participants

Societal posture to widower and widowhood in Nigeria:

Efforts were made by the researcher in this study to ask the informants the societal posture to widower and widowhood rites observed by them in their different culture. It was found that those that were interviewed had different experiences. Their experiences were influenced by their ethnic groups, more so, civilization, religion and the poor economic situation of Nigeria have changed some of the old practices that was making life unbearable especially for widows.

Mrs Uwalaka, A respondent from Imo state:

“A widow may go away with her children if she wants to leave. If she is living outside her late husband’s village, she should come home to see her late husband’s relatives. About three or four months after the burial of the man, she will come home for thanksgiving service in the church. During the mourning period, she may wear white or black cloth in honour of the late husband. The cloth, necklace and the hearing will be burnt after the thanksgiving service”.

Inheritance vis-à-vis widower and widowhood in Nigerian culture:

Mr Tanko, A respondent from Kano:

“A widower is free to look for another wife the moment his wife dies not minding the number of wives he might be having before. After the third day that the woman had been buried, the widower will make prayers accompanied with the use of food or biscuit and sweets depending on individual economic capability”.

Mrs Yunus, A respondent from Osun state:

“After the death of my husband, his family members sent for me. I travelled down to them. They said since the children were close to me, I should go with these children to cater for them. Before his death, we had cement blocks on our land. One of the relatives borrowed some of the blocks, gradually others went to the land to carry the blocks until everything was carried away”.

Attitude of close families of widower and widow:

Mrs Adjoa, A respondent from Ghana living in Osun State:

“The way families treat widows here is similar with what our people also practice. I am from Ghana, my late husband was a Fanti from Nkuntunase in the Central Region of Ghana. We have settled in Nigeria over 33 years ago, but my husband died some years ago. Before his burial, his senior brother came down and demanded for my own car we have just bought claiming his junior brother promised to give it to him. Also one of the relatives came and took away a Station Wagon car claiming he would be using it for commercial purpose with a promise to be refunding some amount of money every month. He did not refund any amount to the deceased family. None of these people discussed how the children would survive or about their education, but were only after what we laboured to achieve”.

Mrs Afolabi: A respondent from Osun state:

“My husband’s family did not give me any problem after his death, instead they pitied me for the ugly situation of his premature death, but were happy we had a building before his death. It is still the practice that a woman who still has a living husband should not help a widow whose husband had just died to plait or weave her hair immediately the man died. I had problem at getting somebody very close to my house to help in plaiting my hair after my husband’s death”.

Mrs Uche: A respondent from Imo state:

“My husband a pastor had a cloth shop being managed by him and one of our sons. After his death, none of his family members asked me to observe any widowhood rite, we are Christians, nor did they interfere in the shop. My children are now managing the shop”.

How children fare under widower and widowhood:

Olajide Damilare Tosin; A student:

“I am a native of Otun-Ekiti. The second born of the family. I lost my father in a motor accident, and since then I have been finding things hard and difficult both at home and in school. My

mother is a petty trader. During his life-time, he was a police officer, providing for all my needs both at home and in school, everything changed for me after his death”.

Samuel Akinsola, A student:

“My experience under my mum as a widow: I left my mother at a tender age of three years after my father’s death. I had no experience about my mother because we never had any intimacy. I grew up in the house of father’s younger brother who lived with his wife. The woman brought me up both physically and spiritually. I saw her as my mother because of the ways and manner she has impacted passively in my life. Although, I did not find it easy at the initial stage due to my lack of parental support. I wept at times when it was given to me. When I grew up, I developed hatred for my mother because she did not bother herself to check about my welfare where I was living and coping with life challenges at my tender age. My mother wanted me to believe in the reasons why she took some steps to neglect me”.

“My dad’s younger brother’s wife thought me how to be useful for myself, as I am engaging myself in baking activity in my school in order to augment any amount given to me at home. I learnt how to pray, improved my spiritual life, hard work and perseverance under her tutelage. She taught me that hard time never lasts for a long time, if you can only trust God and be and be hardworking. These challenges brought about challenges on my way, assuming I was with my biological mother, probably I would not have had the opportunity of going to school or travelling from place to place, engaging in business and buying a piece of land, but instead I would have become a thug in the local street she is living as a child without mother care and support”.

Opinions of widower and widows on their pains:

As a widower, it was painful when her relatives came and demanded for her belongings, even the building, I had no choice but to yield to their demand for peace to reign

3.3. Focus group discussion

These are few of the views of some respondents during the focus group discussions

Mr Tanko, A respondent from Kano:

“A widow is expected to be at home for four months after the death of her husband. This is to detect if she was pregnant. Nobody will challenge her of being responsible for the death of her husband or expect her to be wailing for his death. There is no particular widowhood rite for her to be observed. She can cook by herself, but there will be people around to assist her in cooking. If she likes she could marry from the family of the late husband. If she had children

for the late husband and they are having a building, she is free to marry another Hausa or from any tribe and bring him to the building. Female children can inherit from their father’s properties. After a woman had inherited, for example a room from her husband properties, and are together with other widows, she can bring her new husband to her inherited room and be living there with other widows of her late husband”.

Wasiu Sulemon, A son:

“My mother died eight years ago, just after I had finished writing the West African Examination School Certificate. I could not continue with formal education. Before her death she established this shop where I have been selling phone accessories, since then I have been into this business. I missed

her motherly love. I am thirty years old, I have not married because I felt she could be the only one that can take proper care of my children and being the last born of my mother”.

Mr Basiru, as a son:

“My mother died when I was a secondary school student at the age of 17. My father had three wives. I could not continue with my secondary school after the death of my mother”.

4. Discussion

This study was conducted among people from three states of different geographical zones in Nigeria who were widowers and widows. Findings from this study revealed that widower and widowhood practices vary from one tribe to another. For example, in Imo state, Nigeria widowhood rites vary among different communities of different dialects.

Considering societal posture to widower and widowhood rites, restricted movement are more imposed on the widows than widower (Nwosu, 2007) causing more psychological hardship for the feminine gender than the male counterpart in the same situation. Though, the practice of such strict cultural rites had reduced as a result exposure through education, modernization and migration to different communities and cities. Despite the widowhood rites been labeled as violation of human rights (Olakitike, 2009), the strict observance are still being observed by those residing among their kinsmen, especially in the southeast of Nigeria.

Religion has brought about drastic changes in the adherence to widowhood rites especially among Christians who do not dictate or compel widows to wear black or a particular colour of cloth. Also, the widower is not forced to stay at home for a number of days as widower can go out at the end of seven days after the wives' burial. In some parts of the country, widows are allowed freedom from their confinement 21 or 40 days post burial of the late husband. For example, post burial rites in Osun State requires the widow accompanied by other women in the family to visit different houses in the community after 21 days and declare her status as a widow saying “Opo nki nyin o” meaning “the widow is greeting you” or she may not talk while the greeting will be made by the women that accompanied her. After observing this traditional rites, she is expected to stay in confinement for the rest of that day. In some other places, after going out on the 21st day, she is to stay confined for the next two days before she is free to go about her normal business.

On inheritance, the practice among Yoruba culture is different from Hausa culture as the family of the husband cannot inherit either the widow or her properties as these properties belonged to the widow. However, new wives always go to their husband's houses with all their beddings and belongings while the would-be husbands would provide accommodation for her bride. It has been observed that in the event of the death of an adult male without an elderly son in Yoruba culture, his brothers or male relations usually take possession of the late man's properties without any consideration for the wife and children or may be such property was acquired by the joint effort of the late man and the widow. This practice was noted by Boparai (1995), that most marriages in Nigeria are governed by customary laws, a wife has absolutely no right to the income or properties of her husband. Also, Nwezi (1989), reiterated that among the Igbo people of Nigeria, the relatives of the late man usually demand documents to properties like investments, landed properties and bank accounts from the widow.

It was also observed that the social attitude of close families to widow and widower is disheartening. Erinsho (2000), narrated the widow may be forced to swear before a family shrine and or drink water that has been used to wash the corpse in order to prove her innocence of the death of her husband. It is believed that any of these measures can be used to detect if the widow is a culprit and will be punished. The disheartening attitude was also reported by Nwezi (1989), noting that the widow is required to provide expensive items, including a white goat and two jars of palm wine for purification purpose to the female members of their husband's lineage who made and implemented decision on every matter concerning widows, while fines were imposed on widows by female members of their husband's patrilineage. Emery (2003), also observed among the Hausa-Fulani community tainted with Islamic religious element, mourning and purification rites are also adhered to and imposed. A Muslim widow in Kano undergoes a four (4) –month mourning period and observes reasonable number of days in seclusion. In Plateau and Bauchi states, Muslim widows observe 40 days of mourning and 30 days of seclusion which run concurrently. Children of widower and widow fare differently in Nigerian culture causing poverty in many homes.

On children, findings revealed family members do not take into consideration the rights and survival of the children after the demise of their parents. Properties are shared among extended family members, making lives unbearable for widowers, widows and their children. The affected children are made to choose relations to live with after the death of their father or mother. If these children are forced to stay at homes against their will, they are sometimes maltreated and eventually abandon such homes. Although many extended families are also afraid of harboring the children of widower or widow against the wish of these children, with the belief that if any bad thing like death or the child missing, the other members of the family can conclude that the child had been used for rituals or making money.

Another factor rarely considered but affected by traditional rites to widow and widower is the education of the children. Instead of the old system of forcing children to live with immediate or extended family members, religious organizations are now taking responsibility of the education and feeding of such children. Free education are also declared for such children by the school managements. However, this practice is mostly common in private primary and secondary schools. In cases where such opportunities are not available, such child are not able to continue with their education. Older children in higher institutions of learning will have to do menial jobs to get money for their education in tertiary institutions. The implications on children are always withdrawal of children from school, engaging in exploitative informal work, engaging children in child labour, hawking, and victim of rape (Osimiri, 1990). Despite the effect of such rites, some widows and widowers are in support of these rites while some are against the practice. In support of the practice Osakwe (1996), Saba (1997) revealed that widows indicated these rites are accepted as normal requirements of their widowhood status, as most women who went through the various rites failed to see anything bad in these rites. This was buttressed by Onyemuchie (2007) that the typical African woman does not feel that her womanhood has been violated by observing widowhood rites, while the Christian body and organizations are preaching against such inhuman behavior.

To identify and eradicate all forms of fundamental harassment and to bring about social, cultural, political and economic empowerment, social workers are required to research into the societal challenges to improve living condition of the affected individuals (Krysk and Finn, 2007). It is pertinent that social welfare perspectives be improved to alleviate the social milieu of widower, widows and their children in Nigerian culture. In recent past, social workers have been interacting and involving themselves in the lives of individuals, families and communities as a whole, in order to maintain, improve and promote the social welfare of members of the society in different areas of their lives such as marital, health, education, economy and many others. This is important for social workers in order to make life meaningful for widowers, widows and their children after the departure of their loved ones or bread winners in the family, which could be the man or the woman.

Social workers through enlightenment programmes need to emphasize on the need for individual in a marital life to have a controlled number of children with a view that if any of the partner dies, will I be able to cater for the children left behind? There is the need to note that whether men or women, one has to be empowered so that if any of the couple dies prematurely, the surviving partner will be able to cater for the family. Social welfare through jingles, hand bills or in their outdoor activities should lay emphasis on the fact that men should empower their wives especially the rich men. This will guide against the resulting consequence of family rites on the widow after the demise of the husband. Such empowerment could be entrepreneurial activity or formal educational certificate which will be difficult for extended families to possess from the widow. Social workers should also encourage men on the need to write and update their 'Wills' to cater for the welfare of the wife and children in the event of death. Men should be encouraged to fully involve their wife as partners in business or other activities that may bound the family.

Social workers in their activities should come to the assistance of widowers, widows and children by visiting or looking for philanthropists or religious organizations that are ready to empower these widows, widowers or their children in their education or learning activities. Also, in order for social welfare to improve the social milieu of widower and widowhood practices in Nigerian culture, policies to abolish the inhuman treatment of widow should be presented to the National Assembly for enactment into law. This involves areas dealing with rites that can affect the health of widows, widowers and children in terms of economy, social life, stigmatization, exclusion and restriction from social activities.

Considering the results of this study, it was observed that although widower and widowhood practices are still in existence in Nigeria, emphasis on it depends on the culture of the geographical zones of the country and perspectives of elders in the community. However, civilization is changing most of these old practices while religion is playing dominant role at abolishing and alleviating the menace caused by such rites in the society.

5. Conclusion

Based on the above findings, widower and widowhood practices are still in existence in Nigeria. Although, observation shows that civilization, migration, and religion have brought drastic changes into widower and painful cultural widowhood rites in Nigeria. Religious organizations such as Christianity is campaigning against such rites and the possessive attitude of family members. Some political leaders are no longer in support of these rigor widow and widower are experiencing in Nigerian culture, so also philanthropists, non-governmental organizations, and lawyers are kicking against these cultural practices. Observation shows strict observance of some of the wicked practices centered on the level of education of those to observe the practices and that of the relatives, so also distance from extended family and the strict observance of the teachings of their religious sects.

Recommendations

- a. Husbands should write how their properties should be shared after their death.
- b. Insurance policies should be regularly updated to cover immediate family members.
- c. Widowhood practices should be abolished or reviewed by traditional elders and rulers of different community.
- d. Women should be considered as next of kin by their husbands while legal barrier to social justice for women should be removed. In- laws should be made to understand widower or widows will have to take care of the children left behind by their dead partner when taking away properties from the family.
- e. There should not be disparity in gender treatment when either of the couples dies.
- f. Relatives of either spouse to realize that the loss of one's spouse is a source of emotional and psychological stress which requires a period of time to overcome, therefore, observance of cultural rites should not be used to compound the suffering of widows.
- g. Society belief that the death of man is caused by the wife should be discouraged.
- h. Family properties should be maintained and used to support the education and wellbeing of the children.
- i. Widows should be allowed to decide on steps to take on marriage after the death of their husbands instead of making them to marry from their late husband's relatives.
- j. Men should assist their wives to be economically strong and have good sources of income, so as to cater for their children in the event of death.

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