
PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS OF WIDOWHOOD

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Abstract

The study investigated the psychological and social problems of widows in Yenagoa Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. The population for this study was made up of all widows from Yenagoa Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. The research design adopted was the descriptive survey. Two research questions were drawn to guide the study. A questionnaire titled Questionnaire for widows (QFW) of reliability coefficient of 0.84 was administered on three hundred widows (300). The researcher was only able to retrieve two hundred and fifty. The mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The result of the study indicated some psychological and social problems of widowhood. The psychological problems are, anxiety, aggression depression etc. Social problems are alienation, mockery, contempt, wife inheritance etc. One of the recommendations proffered that friends, family members, and in-laws of the widows should always assist the widows as much as possible.

Marriage is a recognized and valued institution that exists in every society. The enormous celebrations and public entertainment witnessed during marriage ceremonies among Nigerians in general and the Bayelsa people in particular is today a clear manifestation of the respect and dignity the institution commands. Akinade (1997:34) rightly stated that “marriage often plays a large part in defining one’s identity. It is supposed to be for companionship, procreation, sexual attraction, socially respectable status etc.”

It is not however surprising to note that all enduring marriages virtually end with the death of either the husband or the wife or both. The concept “Widowhood” could refer to either a male or female. However, as a result of gender inequality, that is

prevalent in many societies including Nigeria, the dehumanizing and degrading treatment meted on the widows, this paper is aimed at discussing about widowhood from the female perspective.

Appah in Nkparom and Amakieve, (2003), Akanni (2001), and Asonye (1993), defined a widow as a woman who has lost her husband by death and who remains unmarried. Widowhood can thus be defined as a state or period of being a widow. It is a period between the time a spouse dies and the time she remarries or dies (Akanni, 2001).

At the death of a husband, the widow cries profusely, she does not only cry for the death of the husband, but she is equally skeptical about the kind of traumatic experiences she will face from the society, especially from her in-laws. Eze (2012), noted that in many instances, bereaved women go through the mourning rites without protesting. They may not be able to speak up for themselves. In some societies, like Bayelsa State, the widow is subjected to some degrading and humiliating traditional rites. For example, she is accused of being responsible for the death of the husband. Okojie (1960:95) rightly noted “some one must necessarily cause the death of a man in Africa and that person is likely to be the wife”. Akanni (2001:20) noted that, “because of certain societal customs and beliefs that are contrary to the welfare of widows, they are often looked down upon shamefully-treated and denied their rights”. Ebunoluwa (2001:40) identified that, “widows are rejected by the society and their family as most of their fundamental/human rights are trampled upon”.

Amuche (2003:34) discovered that loneliness is one of the psychological problems a widow encounters. According to her, when the man dies, “the woman misses the man in many areas”. Such as in the area of companionship, responsibility of the children’s welfare, consultation for some vital family matters and decision making. Akanni (2001:41) asserted that, “a widow having been bereaved of her husband and partner is left alone and often feels lonely and afraid”. She is faced with the fear of the future, fear of insecurity and even the fear of death. She is equally saddled with the emotional problem of grief.

From the above, the ordeal widows pass through is very pathetic. Some of this experiences are also evident amongst some widows in Bayelsa State. They pass through a lot of in human treatment that are unjustifiable, unacceptable and dehumanizing. This calls for urgent attention. It is in the light of this, that this paper has decided to embark on a study to highlight the possible problems associated with widowhood in Bayelsa State and proffer likely solutions.

Statement of the Problem

The loss of a loved one in most cases causes a lot of depression and some other problems in the life of the bereaved. As if the problems they experience are not enough, some cultures inflicts some pain and anguish on the widows that have forever lost their

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spouses. Egunoluwa (2001) noted that women are treated like chattels (properties) they are subjected to a number of arduous and dehumanising rites that violate some of their human rights and erode their self-esteem.

From the fore-going, the ordeal widows pass through is also similar to that of Bayelsa State. Widows have cried over the years, so much that it has become very necessary to examine the problems and prospects of widowhood in Bayelsa State and offer measures in remediating the problems with the result of the findings.

Purpose Of The Study

This study is aimed at:

- Identifying the psychological problems of widowhood in Bayelsa State.
- Determining the social problems of widowhood in Bayelsa State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated by the researchers to guide the study.

- What are the psychological problems of widowhood?
- What are the social problems of widowhood?

Design Of The Study

The descriptive survey design was adopted in the study. Descriptive survey study is that in which the researcher collects data from a large sample drawn from a given population and describes certain features of the sample as they are, at the time of the study (Nwankwo, 2013)

Population

The population of this study comprised all the registered widows in Yenagoa L.G.A.- eight hundred and sixty (860) (Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, Bayelsa State.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Three hundred widows in Yenagoa Local Government Area in Bayelsa State were used for the study. The sampling technique was the purposive sampling technique. According to Nwankwo (2006) purposive sampling involves the use of the specific cases which possess the specific characteristics to be studied. The purpose was to find out the psychological and social problems amongst a specific group of persons (widows).

Instrument

The instrument for data collection in this research work was a questionnaire titled Questionnaire for Widows (QFW) and Oral Interview. The QFW was divided into three parts. The first part was aimed at generating biographical data. The second part was aimed at getting information on psychological problems of widows and the third part was aimed at getting information on the social problems of widows. The QFW was a five point likert type questionnaire used to determine the respondents' responses with the items through the following response options; Strongly agree (SA), Agree (A) undecided, (UD) Decided (D), Strongly disagree (SD), weighted 5,4,3,2 and 1 respectively. Face validity of the instrument was established by experts in measurement and evaluation in Educational psychology Guidance and Counseling, University of Port Harcourt. The reliability coefficient of the QFW was 0.84 using the Cronbach alpha technique. The researcher personally conducted the administration of the instrument. Out of the three hundred (300) copies administered, the researcher was able to retrieve two hundred and fifty (250) only. This was because some could not return the questionnaires within the given time frame. The mean and standard Deviation were used to answer the research questions. The criterions mean score of the data collected was 3.00. The description is as follows:

$$\begin{matrix} \text{SA} & \text{A} & \text{UD} & \text{D} & \text{SD} \\ 5 & 4 & 3 & 2 & 1 \end{matrix} = \frac{15}{5} = 3.00$$

All the items with mean (\bar{x}) scores which were equal to or greater than 3.0 were accepted, while those with less than 3.0 were rejected

Results

The finding of the study were based on research question as presented below using tables.

Table 1: Mean (\bar{x}) and Standard Deviation (SD) scores of perception of widows on Psychological problems of Widowhood.

S/N	ITEMS ON Psychological Problems of Widowhood	\bar{x}	SD	Remark
1.	I worry a lot about my present condition as a widow.	3.11	2.47	accepted
2.	I feel like committing suicide when I reflect on my husband's death.	3.90	2.46	accepted
3.	I feel people hate me and my children and they may likely kill us as they killed my husband.	2.012	1.98	rejected

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4.	I don't sleep soundly when I have a problem at hand since my husband died.	3.52	1.88	accepted
5.	Since the death of my husband I cannot stay in a lonely and dark place.	1.24	1.56	rejected
6.	At times I feel that my world has come to an end due to the death of my husband.	2.95	2.41	rejected
7.	I often find myself worrying about something since my husband died.	3.52	2.41	accepted
8.	I am as fearful as some of my friends since my husband died.	2.20	1.02	rejected
9.	I believe I am more nervous than those around me since my husband died.	2.01	2.08	rejected
10.	Since the death of my husband I do nag a lot.	3.52	1.98	accepted
11.	I break things when I am annoyed since my husband died.	3.96	2.31	rejected
12.	I feel like carrying arms to fight my in-laws for abandoning me.	2.95	2.41	rejected
13.	I find myself flogging my children at any slightest provocation since my husband died.	3.27	2.30	accepted
14.	I destroy things at times when I think of the sufferings I am passing through.	1.46	1.67	rejected
15.	Since the death of my husband, I have been having nightmares.	3.50	2.62	accepted

From table 1 above items, 1, 2, 4, 7, 10, 13 and 15 have their mean (\bar{x}) score above the criterion of 3.00, hence were accepted by the respondents as possible psychological problems of widowhood. While items 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12 and 14 that are below the criterion mean of 3.00 were rejected as psychological problems of widowhood. The problems identified are anxiety, the desire to commit suicide, aggression and depression.

Table 2: Mean (\bar{x}) and Standard Deviation (SD) Score of Social Problems of Widowhood.

S/N	ITEMS ON Psychological Problems of Widowhood	\bar{x}	SD	Remark
16.	Since my husband died my friends and in-laws don't interact with me as before.	3.52	2.15	accepted
17.	People do mock me when I lost my husband.	3.88	1.74	accepted

18.	The number of suitors that come to me for remarriage are few especially the young unmarried ones.	3.19	1.18	accepted
19.	I feel people look down on me as a widow.	3.05	1.40	accepted
20.	My in-laws and people around me treat me like an outcast	1.31	1.61	rejected
21.	Before my husband died people around me used to respect me but today the story has changed.	3.27	2.16	accepted
22.	I was a prime suspect when my husband died.	1.56	1.75	rejected
23.	I don't like associating with people as my husband died.	1.59	1.77	rejected
24.	I feel that my children's moral upbringing is at stake now that their father is gone.	3.08	1.62	accepted
25.	I was forcefully inherited by my in-laws.	3.23	1.15	accepted
26.	I have lost my sense of belonging.	3.66	2.58	accepted
27.	People talk to me impolitely since my husband died.	3.00	2.25	accepted
28.	I have lost the companionship I used to enjoy when my husband was alive.	3.36	1.56	accepted
29.	I find It difficult to go to social gathering alone since my husband died.	3.19	1.33	accepted
30.	People ignore me often times.	3.08	2.2	accepted

The data in Table 2 above indicates that items 16, 17, 18, 21, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30 representing social problems have mean scores above the criteria of 3.00 and hence were accepted as social problems of widowhood. On the other hand, items 20, 22 and

23 have mean (\bar{x}) below the criterion mean and therefore rejected as social problems of widowhood. The problems identified are alienation, mockery, contempt, wife inheritance, limited number of suitors of remarriage and poor moral upbringing of widows children.

Discussion

Data from this study support findings from some earlier studies on widowhood. For instance, as regards the psychological problems, Stoll (2013), Shaffer and Sigelman (1991) also found that the widow experiences anxiety. Worry and fear may be as a result of fear of the unknown. Furthermore, she may not be able to meet up with all the responsibilities she and her husband had earlier shared. The widow also feels like committing suicide as Stoll (2013) also noted. In addition, she also experiences depression (Asonye, 1993). The widow exhibits aggressive behaviour (Stoll, 2013). Anger may be exhibited as the widow may feel abandoned and/or not be able to meet with her needs.

As regards the social problems, the study discovered that widows suffer alienation. This is also the view of Stoll (2013). This problem may be attributed to the fear of people being burdened with the requests of the widow, hence she may tend to stay away from them and keep to herself. The widow also suffers mockery and contempt. Akanni (2001) also shares this view. Wife inheritance was another problem, Meek (1971) and Nkparom and Amakievi (2003) also agree with this. This problem could be traced to the fact that where the woman stays within the late husband's family, she will be entitled to have his properties and where she refuses, she may be chased out losing all the properties. Having limiting number of suitors for remarriage was another problem. This agrees with Odunze (1989) and Ebunoluwa (20001). This problem could be attributed to the fact that society may frown at a young man marrying a widow, instead of choosing a young maiden for marriage.

The widow also fears that the moral up-bringing of her children are at stake. Odunze (1989) and Biller (1974) also discovered this. This problem may be caused by the fact that the father in the home is seen as a role model and a strict disciplinarian whose orders must be strictly adhered to, compared to a wife (or woman) who is more subtle in nature. Her orders may be taken for granted and when this happens, there is the tendency that the children's discipline and morality may be at stake.

Conclusion

From the above findings, it was deduced that widows have some psychosocial problems. It is thus very imperative for the effective wellbeing of the widows, that are undergoing these experiences to be properly handled by family members, friends and the society at large.

Recommendations

Base on the finding of the study the following recommendations are made:

- A psychologist, a Guidance Counselor or social worker could offer counseling to the widow as they pass through their grief process. Postponement or denial of grief and mourning only delays or compounds the grief reaction (Stoll, 2013). Through effective counseling, a widow can successfully overcome her emotions, with time knowing full well that life continues without her husband. Through counseling a widow will be made to understand that as a result of the major emotional disruptions, thinking and judgment during early widowhood, it is advisable not to make any major life changes during the first year. For instance not selling the residential house, getting a job, moving or remarrying (Moore, 1988). The widow's recovery from her problems depends on the support she gets from her late husband's family, friends, neighbours, and others whose positive attitude towards widowhood is important.
- Friends, neighbors, family members and in-laws should always be ready to assist the widow as much as possible.
- Through public awareness programmes organized by stakeholders, community members, traditional rulers, religious leaders, etc. the public can be sensitizing not to despise the widow. God Himself who is God of the widow will not be happy about that.
- The federation of women lawyers can sensitize the widows to know their fundamental human rights against any dehumanizing practices of widowhood.
- Government and non-governmental organizations should organize programmes especially public enlightenment programmes for the widows that will enable them overcome their problems.
- Government and non-governmental organizations should encourage young widows to remarry.

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