

# CHALLENGES OF WIDOWHOOD PRACTICES AND COUNSELLING STRATEGIES FOR WIDOWS IN KADUNA STATE

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## **Abstract**

*The main purpose of this paper is to study the challenges of widowhood practices and counselling strategies for widows in Kaduna State. Two research questions and one null hypothesis were formulated for the study, while descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised 796 widows as at the time this study was carried out; stratify purposive random sampling was applied to select the respondents. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Mean, and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while t-test was used to test the hypotheses formulated for the study. All the tests were carried out at 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed that financial difficulty was the main problem of widows in Kaduna State. That culture represented a major factor responsible for widowhood traditional practices in Kaduna State. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made; that government, church, and Muslim Ummah, traditional rulers and women associations should join hands together to ameliorate the conditions of widows in Kaduna State. Counsellors of Northern and Southern widows should take cognizance of the developmental stages of each widow, as this affects their ability to cope with the effects of widowhood practices. Finally, it was suggested that further studies be carried out on the impact of religion family size and education on the effects of widowhood on widows in any part of the country.*

## **Introduction**

The institution of marriage was created by God, by this act, God's intention was for man to live a happy and successful companionship. However, over the years by nature, man's life span on earth can be terminated by death. Therefore, death is inevitable in life. When the man died, the other one left behind is in a condition of widowhood. This is not a palatable condition, and it becomes more disheartening when a woman is left behind to fend for herself and the children.

It is observed that in the early '70's and '80's, widowhood was well pronounced among the elderly women of the age of fifty (50) years and above. However, the current trend of widowhood involves many young women who are faced with many challenges in life. Loss of a husband as the head of the family can cause the wife and the

children a lot of trauma and challenges in life. The sudden departure of the head of the family means bleak future and the beginning of new life entirely. Nwoke in Adamu (2008) posited that the widow is sometimes left in the state of dissolution. Although there is no statistical data to support the claim that we have more widows than widowers in Nigeria, this however, appears to be the case.

The cause of the death of a spouse is numerous but the HIV scourge has caused the death of many men. Some men are no longer content with one woman, thus, they engage in unprotected extra-marital affairs through which they become victims of the deadly disease. More so, with the tradition of polygamous marriage which some Nigerian men are engaged in, with its stress and psychological trauma, their health is negatively affected. This may lead them to suffer from heart attack, diabetes, cancer and other killer diseases which may result in their untimely deaths.

Contributing to the issue of widowhood, Akpala (2006) is of the view that, the death of a spouse can be the most devastating life experience of the affected individual in her lifetime. The psychological trauma that comes after the death of a spouse is always tremendous on the surviving spouse. However, in most cases, a surviving wife becomes the primary suspect for a husband's death, whereas in the case of a husband, he is provided with materials needed to comfort him on the death of his wife. While the wife receives all manner of insults from the spouse's relations, the man on the contrary receives sympathy and encouragement, from relatives, friends and sympathizers. Men are never tortured or suspected to have killed their wives when they die, rather, men are usually encouraged to put behind them, the death of their wives to face the challenges of life ahead of them. In many places, women who lose their husbands are sent away from their matrimonial homes, and all their properties confiscated by their husband's relations. The fact that Nigerian women are being subjected to torture after the death of their husbands is a well-known practice in many parts of the country.

The widow mourns her dead husband for years. Within these years, she is confronted with several problems and challenges from people, both within and out of the relations of the deceased husband. She now takes the position of the husband and attempts to ensure that all needs are met. For example; the physical needs, safety need, needs for belongingness, need for information and so on. Therefore, the study is set to examine the nature of cultural widowhood practices and counselling strategies of widows in Southern and Northern parts of Kaduna State in Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

After the death of the husband of the woman, the in-laws take over immediately the bread-winner dies, by the removal of some of the household properties like cars, television sets, refrigerators, beds, economic trees, land, houses, Bank's account (if any) frozen and other personal belongings. Consequently, the widow becomes a destitute

soon after the burial of her husband and is stripped of the properties of which she might have contributed immensely in building.

Furthermore, sometimes the widow is accused of poisoning the husband, and she is expected to prove her innocence by swearing by crossing over the coffin, or drinking the red sand of the grave of the deceased husband, or forced to drink water used for bathing the husband's corpse. The above situation shows that widows suffer a lot for lack of human needs and most of these needs cannot be met in their lifetime. The stress they pass through may lead to the early death of some of the widows.

The researcher wonders why the loss of a beloved spouse should result in oppression and deprivation instead of sympathy and support. Perhaps, the community bond of our traditional society is being rapidly replaced by the pervading spirit of individualism and greed? The observation of the researcher is that; widows find it difficult to adjust to the new situation in which they find themselves. Therefore, the researcher is interested in investigating the nature of cultural widowhood practices in Southern and Northern parts of Kaduna State and to proffer possible solutions to these problems using some counselling strategies appropriate to the plight of the widows in the study area with the view of helping them through counselling to ameliorate the negative widowhood practices. Where we find mostly Christian widows in the Southern part of Kaduna State and Muslim widows at the Northern part of the State for the study respectively.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges of widowhood practices and counselling strategies for widows in Southern and Northern parts of Kaduna State. The specific objectives are to:

1. examine the nature of widowhood practices in Southern and Northern parts of Kaduna State,
2. assess the influence of culture on the widowhood practices in Southern and Northern parts of Kaduna State,

### **Research Questions**

This study is designed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the nature of widowhood practices in Southern and Northern parts of Kaduna State?
2. How does culture influence widowhood practices in Southern and Northern parts of Kaduna State?

### **Hypothesis**

In this study, the following null hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the widowhood practices and nature of widowhood in Southern and Northern parts of Kaduna State.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts descriptive survey design. The descriptive survey design enables the researcher to obtain the opinion of representative samples of the target population to infer the perception of the entire population. The population of the study covers all the windows in Northern and Southern parts of Kaduna State in all the twenty-three (23) Local Government Areas that make up the study Area. Owing to the impossibility of ascertaining the exact population of widows in the Northern and Southern Areas, the population is put at infinity. The assumed population of this study is therefore put at infinity. The sample size of seven hundred and ninety-six (796) widows in Northern and Southern Areas was used. This sample size was randomly distributed among the various Local Government Areas that constituted the study area to ensure spread. The sampling technique for this research was a purposive random sampling where the respondents were sampled principally because of the status as widows and randomly as available during the period of the administration of the instrument for this research. A structured questionnaire titled, "Challenges and Counselling Strategies of Widows in Southern and Northern parts of Kaduna State" (CCSWSNKS) was used as an instrument for data collection for this study. The research instrument was designed along a modified 4 point Likert Scale with options ranging from strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD), which was used to score the responses of the respondents. The questionnaire contain items used to elicit responses that would help to provide answers to the research questions or general cultural widowhood practices. The instrument was subjected to validation by experts in the areas of Educational Research and Statistics and in the field of Guidance and Counselling. The experts checked for the appropriateness of the language structure and relevance of the items to the study and offered useful suggestions. To ensure the reliability of the instrument, the researcher conducted a pilot test in Kaduna North and South Local Government Areas of Kaduna State. The CCSWSNKS was administered to thirty (30) widows. The researcher ensured that the respondents for the pilot test were not members of the population that participated in the main study. The test-re-test method of reliability was used where responses from two separate administrations (after two weeks' interval) were correlated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics (PPMC). The result of the pilot test indicated a reliability coefficient of 0.87. Therefore, it was concluded by the value obtained that the instrument was reliable for gathering the data required in this study. The respondents personally fill the questionnaire, (except those who cannot read but were guided by the Research Assistants and their responses ticked or recorded accordingly) to express their candid opinions. The mean, standard deviation were used

to answer the research questions, while t-test, was used to test the hypothesis. The mean bench mark for accepting or not accepting the mean is 2.50. Hence, mean score of 1.00 – 2.49 was accepted while mean score of 2.5 and above was accepted.

## Results

**Research Question One:** What is the nature of cultural widowhood practices in Southern and Northern parts of Kaduna State?

**Table 2: Nature of cultural Widowhood Practices in Southern and Northern parts of Kaduna State**

**N= 796**

S/No	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1.	The widow scrap-off her hair during the mourning period.	66	147	406	177	2.13
2.	The widow is not allowed to wear necklace or earrings during the mourning period.	352	210	160	74	3.06
3.	Wailing at specified period to show her grief.	110	221	349	116	2.41
4.	Lack of bath for many weeks during the mourning period.	210	120	206	260	2.35
5.	The widow is not allowed to eat or drink publicly during the mourning period.	73	291	268	164	2.34
6.	The property of the late husband is confiscated from the widow.	95	219	215	267	2.18
7.	Widows are generally accused of killing their husbands.	43	157	247	349	1.87
8.	The widow is left on the parenting of the children alone.	69	251	283	193	2.25
9.	The widow mourned her late husband for fifty days before been free to remarry.	209	136	254	197	2.45
10.		22	66	165	543	1.46

Drinking water used in washing up her late husband's corpse.

**Sectional Mean**

**2.25**

Table 2: presents the analysis of data with respect to the nature of cultural widowhood practices in Southern and Northern parts of Kaduna State. The mean score of 2.25 indicates that respondents disagree with these negative practices. It is therefore established that negative practices related to widowhood in Southern and Northern parts of Kaduna State is not very widespread.

**Research Question Two:** How does culture influence widowhood practices in Southern and Northern parts of Kaduna State?

**Table 3: Influence of Culture on Widowhood Practices in Kaduna State**

**N= 796**

S/No	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1.	The widow is forced to remarry into her late husband's family.	247	182	196	171	2.63
2.	Mourned my late husband for forty (40) days before been free to remarry	314	228	180	74	2.98
3.	Making the widow sit on the floor wailing at intervals.	51	121	556	68	2.19
4.	Wearing of black dress and no make-up during the mourning period.	77	275	328	116	2.39
5.	The widow force to drink water used for washing up her husband's corpse	44	57	263	432	1.64
<b>Sectional Mean</b>						<b>2.37</b>

Table 3 presents the analysis of data with respect to the impact of culture on widowhood practices in Kaduna State. The mean score of 2.37 indicate that respondents disagree with the cultural widowhood practices in Kaduna State and should be discarded or minimize.

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the widowhood practices in Southern and Northern

parts of Kaduna State.

**Table 4: t-test of Difference in Widowhood, due to cultural widowhood practices**

<b>Cultural widowhood practices</b>	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Decision</b>
Between Groups	3.949	2	1.974	12.005	.000	Rejected
Within Groups	130.419	793	.164			
Total	134.358	795				

The test on Table 4 was carried out to establish whether there is differences in widowhood practices due to respondents' cultural widowhood practices. With a significant value of .000 (less than the 0.05 level of significance), the hypothesis is rejected. It is therefore concluded that there is significant difference in widowhood practices due to respondents' cultural practices. It can therefore, be inferred from the analysis above that widowhood practices are influenced by cultural practices. This substantiated the finding above which stated that there is a significant difference.

### **Discussion of Findings**

In research question one, it was established that negative cultural practices related to widowhood in Southern and Northern parts of Kaduna State is not very widespread. With the overall mean score of =2.25, it indicates that respondents disagree with these negative practices. The result of this study revealed that there exists differences in widowhood practices among the respondents in the Northern and Southern parts of the State. The widowhood practices among the Hausas in the Northern parts differed significantly to their Christian counterparts in the southern part of the state. Generally, women have no inheritance rights in the southern part of the state. They can neither inherit from their parents nor from their husband's family (Akpala, 2006). The study shows that inheritance of land, houses, economic trees, money, and so on is by the sons of the family. Where the man died without a male child, his property movable and immovable is given to his brothers or uncles. Hence this study revealed that the widows from the southern part of Kaduna State could hardly cope with the problem of looking after their young children of school age.

On the other hand, studies show that the Holy Koran accords the Hausa Muslim widow one-quarter of her late husband's property. This corresponded with the result of a study carried by Ajijola (2009) which indicates that the proportion could be higher or less depending on whether she has children and/or whether she is the only wife of the deceased or not. The result further states that the property of Hausa Muslim widow in the northern part of the Kaduna State could inherit properties ranging from houses,

land, livestock, to electronics, farm produce, and shares in companies and factories.

With these differences in cultural widowhood practices and even those practices not mentioned as the result showed effort should be made to accord the Christian widows from the southern part of Kaduna State a fair share of their late husband's property as being enjoyed by their Hausa Muslim counterparts in the Northern part of the state.

The influence of cultural background was not established, which indicates that the cultural background of the widow does not influence the practices of widowhood. This view was supported by Ezekwesili (2006) in her study that culture should not be seen as an enemy or friend but something that can be employed by human beings for the growth and development of humanity. The findings also agreed with Okoye (2005) and Meena (2009), in their separate studies that not all cultural practices are right, but, however, used to discriminate against women (widows) as regards property ownership.

The result of the study further shows that the widows who were affected by the negative in human cultural widowhood practices engaged in many activities to cope with the obnoxious cultural practices ranging from prayers, trading and others. This finding corresponds with the result of a study carried out by Ezekwesili (2006) and observed that the widows on their own do not relax, but engaged in many activities to cope with the cultural practices. Here, the findings clearly show that the widows exhibit a high sense of concern for their plight and work hard to cope with the negative inhuman cultural practices.

## **Conclusion**

From the findings of this study, it can be deduced that widows in Southern and Northern parts of Kaduna State suffered discrimination, dehumanization and destitution as a result of cultural widowhood practices. Moreso, most widows lack the basic awareness of the role of counsellors in helping them adjust to their new state of life.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations have been advanced based on the findings of the study:

- a) Government should enter into dialogue with stakeholders to remove or stop the obnoxious negative cultural widowhood practices.
- b) Rehabilitation centres can be created for widows where they can learn self-help skills and receive free counselling services.
- c) Counsellors should be conversant with the negative cultural widowhood practices before engaging in any counselling relationship with the widows.



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