

CONTEMPORARY WIDOWHOOD PRACTICES IN NSUKKA

By

OBI LOR, Ngozi Mary
nm.obilor@unizik.edu.ng
+2348062913452

Abstract

Widowhood practices have survived through generations and continues to exist even in contemporary times. More worrisome is the gender bias that has been instituted in male dominance which exist culturally in Nigeria; Igbo communities to be precise and has consequently, increase the vulnerability of widows to trauma and depression. Therefore, this study investigated the widowhood practices that exist in contemporary times. It anchored on radical feminism because, the theory effectively explained the continued existence of widowhood practices even in contemporary times. The study adopted a descriptive design and a probability and non-probability sampling technique. Data was derived through secondary sources of data collection technique and the use of a research questionnaire. Data derived from the study were presented in tables and analysed using simple percentages. The research findings revealed that, the contemporary widowhood practice in Nsukka are shaving of hair, seclusion, wearing black\white cloth, widowhood disinheritance, restriction of movement, not going out at night and not sleeping alone. The study however, found out that the rate of widowhood disinheritance is very low and that, widowhood practices leads to poverty, depression, high blood pressure and low self-esteem. Therefore, it was recommended that, that government make laws prohibiting all the obnoxious widowhood practices by placing strict sanctions on the enforcers of these widowhood practices.

Key words: Patriarchal, Widow, Widowhood Practices, Widow Disinheritance.

Introduction

Death is an inevitable part of man. But, the occurrences after death, usually determined by humans under the cloak of custom and traditions determines the state of surviving relatives especially; the husband or wife of the deceased. While men are most likely to have soft landing in most society, women are in most cases, exposed to different forms of

inhumane treatments at the demise of their husbands (Akinbi, 2015). Chukwu-Okoronkwo (2015) noted that this is one prejudices against women in different cultures in Africa; with accompanying elaborate guiding regulations which widowers are free from, as the culture or tradition has prescribed little or no mourning rites for them.

Erinosho (2000) narrated that the ordeal of a widow begins with accusations and victimizations by the kin of her spouse who holds the view that she (the widow) is responsible for the death of her husband as the death of a man is never seen as a natural occurrence (Alao, 2019). This is followed by numerous practices, rituals and rites which according to Korieh (1996) are sets of expectations regarding the actions and behaviour of the widow; including actions by others towards the widow; as well as the rituals performed by or on behalf of the widow from the time of the death of her husband.

However, the Marriage Act clearly stated the rights of widows after the death of their husband's death even without a valid will (Ogundipe, 2001). Similarly, under customary law widows are not entirely without rights but, Adeyemo (2016) stated that, in the native law and customs of some people in Nigeria, a wife cannot inherit her late husband's properties since she is like a chattel to be inherited by a relative of her husband. Thus, Bernard (1995) stated that women gets the worse deal out of marriage as customary law permits and perpetuates discrimination on the basis of gender

especially in family relations (Eweluka, 2002). Eweluka further opined that women experience and suffer marital frustrations and depression than men and this continue even at the demise of the husband, where a woman will have to face series of dehumanizing treatments from the in-laws, with the claim that, she killed her husband. In affirmation, Lasebikan (2001) stated that, widows are oppressed, suppressed, afflicted, neglected, suspected, and insulted and their situation is quite awful especially as they are most at times poor and uncared for by people who are supposed to give them succor and help.

According to Olakitike (2009) these widowhood practices vary from one place to another but a common phenomenon is the domination of a male member of the deceased family; to acquire the properties of the deceased upon the demise of a family member. By implication, this may render the deceased family homeless and generally poor. Ilozue (2007) added that, a general practice in many places in Nigeria includes; shaving of hairs, wearing of black/white clothes, sleeping on the floor or mat, refrain from taking bath for a period of time, being made to swear with husband's corpse and seclusion.

Okoye (1995) explained that these practices are aimed at making the widow miserable, wretched and guilty over her loss. Nevertheless, Usman (2020) observed that the trend in widowhood has changed from elderly to young women. These widows according to Peterman (2012) face manifold forms of discrimination and deprivation in property and asset inheritance, and suffer deplorable abuse and exploitation at the hands of in-laws; which results in mental and physical health issues (Campbell et al., 2001; Coleman et al., 2006; Lowe and McClement, 2010; Luoma and Pearson, 2002; Van De Walle, 2013). But, in recent times, even when most widowhood practice seem to have phased away especially with the level of enlightenment and women empowerment in the society, some others seem to have continued to exist perhaps, because it satisfies the interest of some people.

Thus, it is necessary to investigate these widowhood practices that have continued to exist even in contemporary times and their effects on widows. This is to enable policy makers as well as the general public to tackle these practices and ensure the protection of widows; within and outside the home.

Statement of Problem

Widowhood practice has existed and continues to exist even in recent times. It can be argued that widowhood practice is as old as man but, most worrisome is the inhumane practices that women are subjected to in the guise of custom and tradition. No doubt every society have rites that are associated with the death of one's spouse but most worrisome is the gender bias and prejudice that is associated with these rites. Several evidence have showed that men are not subjected to as much rites; especially dehumanizing rites as women are when they loss their spouse. It is also unfortunate that this inhumane practice (widowhood practice) is carried out by women (*umuada*) on fellow women who lose their husbands under the guise of tradition.

Generally, women are asked to shave their hairs and wear black/white clothes which is less inhumane but, in recent times, some greedy in-laws may as well disinherit their brother's wife to inherit their late brother's properties especially, landed properties. This in most cases happens when the widow is disliked, unable to bear a male child for her husband or when the male children bore to the deceased are handicapped, sick or still

small. This practice seem to be supported by the patriarchy nature of the Nigerian society, which gives priority and more relevance to male children than to female children.

This practice do not just deprive widows of the means to care for themselves and their children but also, makes them vulnerable to trauma and depression. This is worsened by the fact that widows are usually not allowed to engage in any form of economic activities during the mourning period. However, the illiteracy of widows further puts widows at disadvantaged position as it limits the socio-economic opportunities accrued to them and also, prevents them from knowing and fighting for their rights as women even in the face of oppressive traditional practices.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions

1. What are the contemporary widowhood practices in Nsukka?
2. What are the factors that makes women vulnerable to oppressive widowhood practices in Nsukka?

3. What are the effects of oppressive widowhood practices among victims in Nsukka?
4. How can oppressive widowhood practices be curbed in Nsukka?

Research Objective

The broad aim of this study is to examine the contemporary widowhood practices in Nsukka so as to make recommendations that would help to curb the oppressive widowhood practices in the area and the society at large.

Literature Review

An Overview of Widowhood Practices

Widowhood practices are observed differently across all cultures. Among the Yoruba, widows are expected to wear black clothes, unweave her hair, have a low cut, cry, shave or scrape her hairs, sit on a bare floor or a mat at best and go into seven days seclusion during which they are not expected to take a bath or change their clothes (Adekanye, 1988). While some communities may expect her to eat from broken plates and cooked with broken pots (Fasoranti and Arunah 2007), At the end of forty days, three months, four months as the case may be, the

final rites which includes being 'washed' in the night after having the final wailing and making some rituals which are expected to finally put the spirit of the departed to final rest and the 'outing' which involves change of dresses and being led to the market, are performed on the widow.

Aransiola and Ige (2010) noted that these practices are carried out to protect widows from being harmed by the spirit of the late husband and claim responsibility and care for the widow if she had been pregnant as at the time the husband died. Fazoranti and Arunah (2007) stated that after the wailing periods, widows experienced several degradations and deprivation and may be accused of killing their husband and thus, asked to swear with either the Holy Bible or the Holy Quran or through other traditional means like being asked to drink the water used for washing the corpse in order to prove their innocence.

Adekanye (1988) asserts that at the end of the mourning period, the widow is inherited by a male relative of her dead husband through "Osupo", just like the rest of the man's property. Ilozue (2007) however stated that this practice has greatly been affected by modernization, education, Christianity and

high level of exposure of the woman. It is also influenced by the level of greed among family members, the relationship that exist between the woman and her in-laws and the attitude and behavior of the woman (widow) before the death of her husband.

Among the Igbos, Nwanegbo (1996) observed that, in some parts of Igbo land, when a man dies the wife will tie a wrapper over her chest without a blouse, must not talk to anybody and will not have her bath until her husband is buried. After the burial, the 'Umuada' (daughters of the man's ancestors) will come to shave her hair, bath her in an open compound, only having the privacy of being surrounded by the 'Umuada'. She is then confronted with questions surrounding her deceased husband death and where the explanations are not satisfactory, the widow must drink the water used in bathing the corpse of her husband to prove her innocence.

Nzewi (1981) revealed that among the Igbos, relatives of the late husband demand for document relating to the deceased properties including lands, investment and bank account and may be required to provide expensive items like a white goat and two jars of palm wine for purification purpose to the female

members of their husbands lineage who made and implemented decision on every matter concerning widows.

They were also, forbidden from touching any object including their body. Hence they were given piece of sticks to scratch their bodies, while their food is also cooked in old pots rather than those normally used for cooking for other members of the family. Like the Yoruba, they were made to sleep on old mats placed on wooden planks which would be burnt at the end of the mourning period (Nzewi, 1981).

Among the Ikwere in Rivers State, the man's extended family assumes instant control of his belongings as soon as he dies. They also, give the widow list of what she has to provide before her husband's body could be buried. These include goat, yams and drinks, followed by a levy to cover the funeral expenses. The widow will wear a single black mourning cloth for six months and cannot eat with spoon or a decent plate. At the end of the mourning period, there will be a second burial after which she can remarry (Akinbi, 2015).

Akinbi (2015) opined that, in AkwaIbom State, there are two forms of widowhood

rites; The Christian and the Non- Christian rites. The former involves sacrificing a fowl and shaving the hair during which incantations are said. After her husband's death, the widow is not allowed to go out, but will be made to sit on the same location to cry and mourn; wearing the same wrapper and blouse for a period of six weeks until after the burial.

One of the beliefs of the community is that, a man and his wife shared everything in common in their lifetime thus, in order to sever the relationship, her pubic hair is shaved, her finger nails cut and buried near the grave. During this ceremony, the following words are said: "this is your share from the body of your wife, so take and leave her alone for she has nothing in common with you as from this day that you are given your share" (Akinbi, 2015).

After this, the woman is bathed in public by other women as the final separation ritual. Rites were also performed to separate the children; she is asked to buy dead and dried young chick, which will be used to brush the children's body. Every part of the house would be swept and the rubbish thrown away at the foot of a plantain tree. These rites are

being performed by the elderly widows of the family and it involved one bottle of hot drink, minerals, palm-wine and cooked food. The women also camp with the widow for three days. After the burial, items such as jar, plates, cups that belong to the husband will be packed away by his brothers and a little portion of land would be given to the widow if she has a male child (Akinbi, 2015).

Akinbi recorded that in Non-Christian rite, a widow would have to wear the same cloth for six months. After the burial, she will be “put into widowhood” by the older widows of the lineage and made to wear a sack for six months. She will provide drinks, fowl, palm-wine and food and asked to confess if she had sex with another man since her husband’s death. She will take an oath and then be able to bath every night if she is not guilty of sleeping with another man.

Again, she will not plait or comb her hair, after eating twice a day, she will not wash her hands until the following day. After the burial, she will not go to the market, farm for another six months. When it is time to celebrate her widowhood, the ladies come around and rub her whole body with a substance they called ‘*Iduot*’. With the sack

she is wearing, she will be told to go to the market to buy some items, she will not be allowed to cover her body and her hair.

Before leaving the house, she will be given four small sticks to hold in her palms and a particular leaf called “*Ofuho*” which she puts in her mouth so that she will not talk to anybody. Other ladies will accompany her, at the market she will not go in but will beckon on someone to come, who she will tell what she needs from the market and give the person money to buy the items for her. When she gets home, her hair will be shaved with razor and certain decorations will be done on her body.

The next being the real celebration day, her sackcloth will be changed to a wrapper. She will be given a hen which is used to rub her whole body and she will be asked to mention whom to marry so that the person will come out and divorce her from her late husband and give some money with yams, fowl, palmwine, snuff, kolanut and she will dance all day. She will be taken to the market accompanied by drummers, dancers, men and women. People will give her gifts, money and food items. After that, she will be accompanied home by those who dance to the

market with her and they will be served food and drinks; after all these, they will all leave in the evening and the widow will then be free to go to the stream, market, farm and everywhere she wants (Akinbi, 2015).

Reasons for Prevalence of Widowhood Practices in Nigeria

Some of the reasons for the prevalence of widowhood practices are highlighted below.

Superstitious Beliefs: Chukwu-Okoronkwo (2015) explained that, there is the widespread belief in African societies including Nigeria that without all these rites and practices, the spirit of the dead man will not have rest, instead his soul will be wandering around and in some cases the dead man's spirit will destroy things and hurt people in the community. So, the wife has to go through all these widowhood practices to appease the dead.

State of Joblessness of the Wife/ Poverty:

This is another contributory factor, where wives depend solely on their husband for survival. This usually placed them at abject poverty level after the death of their husbands as other members of the extended family would want to lay claim to the deceased

husband's properties. If women are economically empowered, they would be able to stand up and refuse to compromise to these obnoxious widowhood practices. Also, the attitude of most poor in-laws are triggered by poverty as they tend to see the death of their relative as a golden opportunity to enjoy their late bother's money.

Male-Dominance: The divinity ascribed to the husband by culture influences the performance of rites and rituals such as impurity, defilement, cleansing and purification as well as period of seclusion when the man dies (Okoye, 1995). The male-dominance influences greatly the practices of widowhood in patriarchy societies like, Nigeria. Also, the act of bride price payment by men has made them regard women as commodities to be exchange with money or materials things. Thus, it is believed that men owns the women in totality and she must under strict cultural demand mourn with all her heart and body, (Okoye, 1995).

Lack of Education: in the past women's education was seen as secondary and not important. This increased the rate of illiteracy among women and according to Olumukoro (2011) increases their vulnerability to health

issues, inadequate diet, early entering into motherhood, frequent pregnancies and continued cycle of poverty. Okonkwo (2004) further pointed out that illiteracy of widows in this part of the country has put them at disadvantaged position. Studies have also shown that widowhood rites and practices, meted on widows who are educated and have a means of livelihood are not the same as those who are less educated and are not economically empowered. The educated widows are economically empowered and are able to fight for their rights because of their financial capability (Emewu, 2003).

Failure of Men to Write a Will: Chukwu-Okoronkwo (2015) stated that most husbands do not bother to write a will before their death and when such is suggested by their wife, this might attract a village or family council meeting on the basis that she is planning to kill the husband so as to inherit his properties. But, this places the wife at a disadvantaged position when they die as the in-laws may want to confiscate their brother's properties, show antagonism to the wife and evict her from the family house.

Lack of Respect for Women fold: Africa is being seen to be "a man's world", due to our

patriarchal background therefore, women are being treated as an article; without respect especially, when their husband dies.

Implications of the Widowhood Practices on Nigerian Widows

Chukwu-Okoronkwo (2015) stated that, widows are faced with extreme poverty, discrimination and dehumanizing treatments and are miserably deprived of their social security and family support. Their children too are isolated, often in unhealthy condition, physically abused and at times without inheriting any property. Yvonne and Browning (2002) stated that, many widows are emotionally deranged and psychologically unstable and are prone to shock, temporary or even permanent loss of memory and sense.

Health wise, they are prone to any kind of diseases, especially after drinking the disgusting water used in bathing a corpse and are likely to be diagnosed of hypertensive due to the burden they bear alone (Yvonne and Browning, 2002). In some instances, they are avoided and stigmatized in the society and treated as abomination. Most of them lose their friends, become loners and are

vulnerable to emotional problems like depression and perhaps, suicide.

In view of the above, the implication of widowhood practices on widows can be socio-economically as well as physically. Obviously, when widows are disinherited, they can barely cater for themselves and their children. Therefore, they may be unable to cater for their basic needs, feed well and if need be, effectively take care of certain health conditions that may manifest. This would obviously contribute to the emotional trauma of losing their spouse and make them lose hope in life. Also, this is likely to make them vulnerable to emotional ailments like trauma and depression which may worsen into suicide and high blood pressure. In all, widowhood practices have grave consequences on widows as well as their children and can directly or indirectly influence the rate of child and mother mortality.

Theoretical framework

This study anchored on the radical feminism theory because it effectively explained the reason for oppressive widowhood practices in Nigeria. Though this theory was criticized for laying too much emphasis on gender

thereby, overlooking other primary source of oppression like race, it effectively explained that, the actual cause of widowhood practice in Nigeria is gender inequality; perpetuated by the patriarchal social structure.

This theory seeks for the abolition of patriarchy in a struggle to liberate women and girls from a perceived unjust society by challenging existing social norms and institutions. It therefore viewed the society as a patriarchy in which men dominate and oppress women.

Based on this theory, the dogma “man’s world” have given men excessive right to control almost all aspects of the society and put in place laws that suits and benefits them. Similarly, most widowhood practices especially, widowhood inheritance and levirate marriage sought to empower men with the control of their late brother’s property thereby, depriving the widow. In a similar context, women are seen as commodities which are bought through the payment of bride price and transferred from one person to another when dead occurs.

Obviously, these laws are made by men and are projected to maintain the status quo and ensure the dominance of men and the

oppression of women. It may be argued that the perpetuation of most widowhood practices are women; the 'Umuada', but logically these 'Umuadas' seem to be doing the biddings of men. This is based on the fact that women are not allowed to participate in decision making in the community but are encouraged to enforce these decisions when made by men. Therefore, having set the pace, women follow suit and oppress women who have lost their husbands but certainly not without the support of the social structure.

Research Methodology

The study focused on contemporary widowhood practices that are oppressive in Nsukka. This study focused on young widows because, they are more likely to give firsthand information on the contemporary widowhood practice in the area. The area shares boundaries with Idiomma of the present Benue state in the North-east and Igala of the present Kogi State in the North and north-west. It is bounded on the east by Ishielu in Abakiliki zone now Ebonyi State and Nike in Enugu zone. It also, shares boundaries with Udi in the South and Ifite Awgwali in area of Anambra State (Onyeji, 2018).

According to Nsukka professionals (2019), Nsukka community is the headquarter of Enugu-North senatorial zone and includes communities like; Enugu-Ezike, Aku, Ozalla, OpiLeja, Obukpa, Okpuje, Ibagwa-ani, Alor-Uno, Ibagwa-aka, Ede-Oballa, Edem, Ukehe, Obollo-afor, Obollo-Eke, Ikem, Ekwegbe, Ohodo, Uvuru, Nkpologu, Abbi, Adani, Ukpabi, Nimbo Ugbelle ajima, Nrobu. Ovoko, Orba, Imilike, Ihe-aka, Obimo, Obollo-etiti, Ogbodo-Aba, Mbu, Neke, Umuruokpa, Iga, etc.

The total area of Nsukka zone is about 3961 square kilometers and is inhabited by a people whose population according to an estimate from the 2006 census to 2022 is 444100 (Citypopulation, 2022). The most densely populated part of Nsukka areas is Enugu-Ezike, Aku and Ukehe in Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area and Opi in Nsukka Local government Area while the most squarely populated are Uzo-Uwani and Isi-Uzo Local government Area.

In the past, the area like other parts of Igbo communities have experienced different widowhood practices like; seclusion, wearing of black cloth, shaving of hair, bathing very early or very late at night, drinking of water

used to bath the dead husbands corpse, eating with a particular plate and drinking with a particular cup and not eating food that is cooked outside the house, levirate marriage and widow disinheritance. However, it is observed that despite the level of enlightenment and civilization in 21st century Nigeria, some areas in Nsukka still practice some of these widowhood practice. It is on this backdrop, this study sought to investigate these practices so as to protect women from these oppressive widowhood practices.

The study adopted a descriptive research design because it enabled the research to gather data from the responses of respondents and events and happenings in the general environment. The study adopted a probability and non-probability random sampling techniques. The probability sampling technique was used to select the place used for this study because, these places share

Research Findings

Table 1: Distribution of questionnaire

Communities	Number of questionnaire distributed	Number of questionnaire returned	Percentage (%)
Aku	31	23	33.8%
Ovoko	31	20	29.4%
Enugu-Ezike	31	25	36.8%
Total	93	68	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

similar culture even as regards to widowhood practices. Thus, Ovoko, Aku and Enugu-Ezike was selected to represent the other community.

Using a sample calculator of 95% confidence level, population proportion of 40, margin of error of 10 and population size of 444100, a sample population of 93 was derived for this study. This population was divided between the three communities; 31 in each of the communities. This population comprised of women from different socio-economic status who have not been widow for more than 5 years.

The researcher also adopted snowball sampling technique in selecting respondents for this study. Data was however presented in tables and analyzed using simple percentage. The research hypotheses were however analyzed using the chi-square statistical test.

The above table shows that, the sample size of this study was 68. Most of the responses were derived from Enugu-Ezike while Ovoko had the least response. This could be because, those in Ovoko were not as accessible as the other communities or that the literacy level in Ovoko was lesser than the other communities thereby, causing respondents to fill the research questionnaire wrongly.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by age

Age	Population	Percentage
18 – 25	9	13.2%
26 – 33	20	29.4%
34 - 41	19	27.9%
42 - 49	11	16.2%
50 and above	9	13.2%
Total	68	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The table above shows that most of the respondents were young widows who were between the ages of 26 to 41 and thus, are well knowledge on contemporary widowhood practices in their community.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents by educational qualification

Educational qualification	Population	Percentages
No education	25	36.8%
FSLC	21	30.9%
O'Level	15	22.1%
Tertiary	7	10.3%
Others	-	-
Total	68	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The above table shows that most of the respondents were not educated. It also showed that very few of the respondents went beyond the secondary school level. By implication, this means that very few respondents were educated enough to possibly know their rights or become gainfully employed in the formal sector.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents by occupation

Occupation	Population	Percentage
Civil servant	11	16.2%
Trader	9	13.2%
Farmer	23	33.8%
Unemployed	25	36.8%
Others	-	-
Total	68	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The above table showed that most of the respondents were unemployed. However, a large number of them were farmers. This could be because, most communities in Nsukka are agrarian communities.

Table 5: Which of these did you experience when you lost your husband?

Widowhood practice	Population	Total	Percentage	Total
Shaving of hair	61	68	89.7%	100%
Seclusion	12	68	17.6%	100%
Wearing black\white cloth	55	68	80.9%	100%
Disinheritance	17	68	25%	100%
Drinking water used to wash husband's corpse	-	-	-	-
Force to marry husband's brother/relative	-	-	-	-
Others: restriction of movement	15	68	22.1%	100%
Not going out at night	27	68	39.7%	100%
Not sleeping alone	23	68	33.8%	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The above table showed that most of the respondents shaved their hair and wore black/white clothes when they lost their husband. But, few of them suffered seclusion, disinheritance as well as other practices like the restriction of movement, and not sleeping alone due to traditional beliefs.

Table 6: What is the rate at which widows are forced to marry any of your husband’s brother/relative?

Rate	Population	Percentage
Very high	-	-
High	-	-
Moderate	-	-
Low	13	19.1%
Very low	18	26.4%
Non-existent	37	54.4%
Total	68	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The above table showed that, the rate of levirate marriage in Nsukka is almost non-existent in contemporary times. Even when some people stated that, it is low, a larger population stated that, it is non-existent in Nsukka.

Table 7: What is the rate of widow disinheritance?

Rate	Population	Percentage
Very high	-	-
High	-	-
Moderate	5	7.4%
Low	17	25%
Very low	39	57.4%
Non-existent	7	10.3%
Total	68	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 8: Why do you think widows are disinherited?

Reason for disinheritance	Population	Total	Percentage
In-laws greed	39	68	57.4%
Hatred for the widow	41	68	60.3%
Absence of will	53	68	77.9%
Absence of a male child	44	68	64.7%
They do not have the means to fight for their right	32	68	47.1%
They do not know their right	29	68	42.6%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Factors	Population	Total	Percentage
Superstitious Beliefs	54	68	79.4%
State of Joblessness of the Wife/ Poverty	22	68	32.4%
Male-Dominance	38	68	55.9%
Lack of Education	11	68	16.2%
Lack of Respect for Women fold	17	68	25%

The table above showed that the absence of will and male child are basic causes of widow disinheritance even though other factors may influence the disinheritance of widows in Nsukka.

Table 9: What are the factors responsible for widowhood practices?

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The above table showed that, the primary reason for the continued existence of widowhood practices is, the existence of superstitious beliefs and the culture of male dominance in Nsukka.

Table 10: Which of these are consequences of oppressive widowhood practices among widows?

Consequences	Population	Total	Percentage
Poverty	21	68	30.9%
Depression	28	68	41.2%
High blood pressure	33	68	48.5%
Low self esteem	16	68	23.5%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The table above showed that, widowhood practices makes women susceptible to poverty, depression, high blood pressure and low self-esteem.

Discussion of Research Findings

The study found out that the contemporary widowhood practice in Nsukka are shaving of hair, seclusion, wearing black\white cloth, widowhood disinheritance, restriction of movement, not going out at night and not sleeping alone. This is in affirmation with

Adekanye (1988) who stated that the widowhood practice in Yoruba culture includes, wearing black clothes and shaving or scraping of hairs. Evidently this study did not focus on other parts of Nigeria perhaps due to its limited scope of the study, it was revealed evidently that, other parts of

Nigeria, the Igbos to be precise also share in this practice.

However, contrary to Adekanye (1988) who asserts that widows are inherited by a male relative of her dead husband just like the rest of the man's properties, the study revealed that in contemporary times, widows are not inherited but are disinherited. The study revealed that though this practice seem to have survived over time, it is drastically fading away as the rate of widowhood disinheritance is very limited in the area. Though Nzewi (1981) and Akinbi (2015) stressed the disinheritance of widows in every aspect, a closer look into the changing times, shows that, the complete disinheritance of widows in contemporary times may be difficult hence, the focus on the disinheritance of landed properties.

Generally, the study revealed that widowhood practices is a function of superstitious beliefs, joblessness of the wife, male-dominance, lack of education and lack of respect for women fold. Chukwu-Okoronkwo (2015) explained that, the widespread belief in African societies including Nigeria that without all these rites and practices, the spirit of the dead man will not

have rest and that without these practices the widow will not be protected from being harmed by the spirit of the late husband (Aransiola and Ige, 2010), propels these practices. But, in examining factors that fosters widow disinheritance, the study revealed that, in-laws greed, hatred for the widow, absence of will, absence of a male child, not having the means to fight for their right and not knowing their right promotes widow disinheritance. This is in line with the finding of Okoye (1995) who opined that widowhood practices is influence by the patriarchal social structure which lays emphasis on male dominance.

Consequently, Chukwu-Okoronkwo (2015) and Yvonne and Browning (2002) stated that widowhood practices can lead to social and psychological consequences. It was also, further revealed in the study that, widowhood practices leads to poverty, depression, high blood pressure and low self-esteem perhaps due to the emotional and financial stress it causes victims of these practices.

Conclusion

Dead is a painful occurrence that causes emotional and perhaps, physical trauma to the relatives of the dead person but, it remains

an inevitable occurrence that can hardly be explained or understood by humans. Worst still is the fact that, the practices associated with the loss of a loss one in a bid to grant the dead everlasting rest in some cases constitute more problem for the loved ones of the dead person because, they are oppressive and exploitative. Despite this, some of these oppressive practices have continued to survive and are present even in contemporary times. A typical example is the practice of widow disinheritance which in most cases takes place when the widow do not have a surviving adult male child.

Certainly, this is done under the guise of tradition centered on the patriarchal culture that deprives females from land ownership. Evidently, in the Igbo tradition, women do not inherit landed properties as allocating any to them is usually seen as a waste since they will eventually get married into another family and abandon the property since they are not expected to take the property to their husband's house but to rely on their husband's inheritance. But, in cases where the female children are not yet adults and perhaps rely on the proceeds from the land to survive the burden of survival becomes tedious. This is because they are usually

faced with different strands of lack, food, money and in extreme cases, shelter; which may trigger other emotional challenges like depression.

In view of this, it is important to tackle oppressive widowhood practices and protect widows and their children through the following measures.

1. There is need for government to make a legislation prohibiting all the obnoxious widowhood practices by placing strict sanctions on the enforcers of these widowhood practices.
2. Government and non-governmental organizations should put in place policies and programmes to empower women. This could be through skill acquisition and educational programmes for women and the girl-child.
3. There is need for reorientation of the public to discourage them against widowhood practices and also, to alter all forms of superstition.
4. Men should endeavor to write a will before their death so as not to give room for their family members to disinherit their wife and children upon their death.

5. Women on their part should endeavor to get a career and reduce dependent on their husband. This will expose them to the resources to fight for their right when need be.

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