

**CAUSES, EFFECTS AND COUNSELLING
STRATEGES FOR AMELEORATING WIDOWS'
AFFLICTIONS IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This paper reviewed widowhood afflictions. Widows' afflictions involved a great violation of widows' right-manifestation as defacement and dethronement, forced levirate marriage, disinheritance, denial of right to dignity and equality. The paper highlighted the causes of widows' afflictions to include war, life responsibilities, silent killer diseases, religious and communal clashes, bomb blast, accidents, and assassination. The paper also discussed some manifestations of the violation on widows' rights and effects of the violation of widows. Counseling techniques, such as rational-emotive behaviour therapy (REBT) which deals with the cognitive thinking, judging and behaviour - orientated approach as a tool in the ameliorating of widows' affliction in Nigeria was discussed. It was recommended that seminars and workshops should be organized for government agencies and personnel, and non-governmental organizations responsible for women affairs as well as community and religious leaders with the view of recognizing the plights of widows and how to address their afflictions.

Introduction

Widowhood in Nigeria and any part of the world is a prominent experience from time immemorial. There has been an increase in the high rate of widowhood which is death, due to war, sickness, accidents, bomb blast, cultism, arms insurgence, silent-killer disease, murder, plane crashes, ethnic riots, religious and communal clashes, assassination and natural disasters (Aderoju, 2005). Nevertheless, widowhood is not a recent phenomenon. Various types of widows such as early widows, middle-age widows and late widows have existed for a long time. Widows are evidently noticeable, recognizable and conspicuous to all. In fact, people live with them, talk with them and see them daily either in neighborhood, place of work, and church/worship places. They share with others their experiences. Damap (2008), observed that the only thing people

seldom do is that they do not relate with widows as should and rarely try to put themselves in their shoes. Who then is a widow? A widow is a female married adult contemplated as having not re-married to any man else since the death experience of her spouse. According to Pearson (2007), a widow is a woman whose husband has died and she remain un-married. The surviving wife of a deceased husband left behind now experiences much grief and mourning in the society. Some may even be stigmatized right from the extended family of the late husband (Duke, 2011).

Death is actually an inevitable end and it comes as a bomb weapon that one has no remedy to it. Indeed, death has no regard for anybody, regardless of personalities, and when it comes to any family, life would never remain the same because there is always a vacuum. It can be argued that, the death of a loved one may be the most extreme life crisis since it severs some of the deepest bonds established in a life time. Such as meeting the needs of the wife in every area of her life including acceptance, security and sincere love. But when a husband dies, some basic questions of needs run through the minds of the wife and children. Such situation poses some emotional, social and psychological challenges.

Though widows, widowers, fatherless, motherless or orphans can be victims of afflictions, the main focus of this paper is on widows because studies have indicated that in Nigeria, the disorganizing and traumatic experience which accompanies death of husbands, tend to be greater than that of the men when they loose their wives (Mathew, 2002 and Damap, 2008). Also, Kore (2014) concur that the scripture are silent regarding widowers. It may be because they can easily take care of themselves. But for widows, fatherless and orphans they are at the mercy of society who may be overwhelmed with excessive sorrow or lamentation. Whereas, in some situation, the wife becomes the prime suspect for her husband's death, the man is immediately offered an appropriate substitution to comfort him upon the loss of his wife. Reason is that from time immemorial, societies have always been male dominated and still so with most black races or generally, women have always been relegated to the background and traditions and customs in Nigeria clearly rob most widows of their rights (Oladipo, 2002).

It is a sentiment that will find an echo in the hearts of those whose loss was thrust upon them suddenly or in the early years of marriage when they still had young children to rear. The trauma of bereavement is exacerbated by the immediate challenge of adjusting to a new and uncertain future prolonged by the pains of separation, the absence of proper support and the lack of close companionship in many situations, where savings are less than adequate, and pensions are less than generous, their suffering is further compounded by financial insecurity as we now have it in Nigeria. It is on this premise that this paper focuses on causes, effects and counselling strategies for the eradicating widows' afflictions in Nigeria. According to Oladipo (2002) women are treated like chattels (properties) especially the unfortunate widows are subjected to trial by ordeal (as primary suspect of the demise of her dear husband). The severity of this trials vary in different states and local government area in order to prove their ignorance they are subjected to a variety of odious and degrading, so called rites that violate some human rights and erode the widows self-esteem, many years of mental, physical and emotional strength. Most of these harmful cultural practices have adverse psychological effect on the widows.

Causes of Widowhood

Researches give signal that men die more than women and as such there are many widows than widowers. This cause of tragedy emerges in various forms, such as through natural disaster, war, accident, sickness bomb blast by insurgence, assassination. Damap (2008) identified some of the causes as follows:

- I. War: during war era men are known exclusively to be in the war front. However, these days women enroll in the arm force through their percentage participation every minute.

- II. Accidents: the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) then south east zonal commander Adeyemi Omisiji observed that no fewer than nine thousand persons die annually in road accident in Nigeria it is obvious that from the above remark that most victims are male drivers, pilots and captains. Infacts, most often than not passengers in any travel vehicle are mostly men who are mostly men who are top government officials and their business counterpart.
- III. Life responsibilities: - the demand and urgent needs of family responsibilities are so mush in some men that they suddenly become victims of depression, blood-pressure, heart attack, excessive stress, stroke and finally death.
- IV. Other reasons: Ethnic riot, religious and communal clashes have increased widowhood, such recent instances were reported in some parts of Plateau State that rendered people homeless, children fatherless and women lost their husband. use their versed experience to bring about improvement in it.

Sexually transmitted diseases such as; HIV /AIDS and execution of armed robbers mostly male victims have accounted to wives being widows with its attendant consequences.

Manifestations of the Violation of Widows' Rights

Some points of human rights violation manifested by the institution of widowhood and its inherent practices are considered below:

i) Defacement and Dethronement:

In the traditional Nigerian society, a woman is never assessed in isolation from her husband. Whatever she has become is attributed to her husband: her beauty, achievements, wealth and property. This implies she belongs to him wholly and totally. Nevertheless, during the death of a husband, the first experience of the wife is to reduce her to nothingness. The commonest observations in the acts of defacement and dethronement irrespective of rural / urban locations include: shaving the widow's hair, stigmatizing her with a particular mourning dress, drinking of the water used in bathing the corpse, forcing her to sleep on bare floor, staying for days without bathing, which makes a widow vulnerable to contaminations and disease infections, forcing her to wail loudly and in the process, injuring herself.

ii) Forced Levirate Marriage:

This refers to a situation where the late husband's brother or relative in the family inherits the widow. Kore (2014), posed that if a widow to be inherited by a male relative of the former husband resists such advance means woes and troubles in addition to sexual harassment. However, if a widow is enlightened and empowered through education, the late husband's family plead with her to consider marrying anyone of her choice from amongst them.

iii) Disinheritance:

In Africa, it is actually not news if a widow has no male child, she stands the risk of losing her right to inherit the deceased's assets. Traditionally, women and female children have no property inheritance right in most parts of Nigeria. Such property inheritance denial may include: land, cash and other assets. In fact, some may be forced to hand over bank savings booklet and cheques to the relatives of the late husband. Such inhuman acts expose the poor widow to undue harsh economic reality.

Denial of Right to Dignity and Equality

Discrimination against widows and the denial of their right to human dignity and equality are the norm in Nigeria. Most often than not, there is a preconceived strategy used by the family members of the late husband to kick the widow off her guards. For instance, some widows are forbidden from working and some times accused of having killed their husbands.

Effects of Widows Afflictions

- i) **Psychological effect:**- the phobia and stigmatization that characterizes being a widow leaves a kind of emptiness which creates a long time wound in the heart of a widow. The fact that widows are being subjected to deprivation, some sort of ridicule and defacement continually has psychological effects on such widows. Such widows experience loss of self-worth, dignity and esteem.
- ii) **Risk of diseases and health problems:** Yet another effect of violation of widows is that it exposes them infections. For instance, being forced to sleep on the bare floor for days without having bath irrespective of whether they are having their menstrual cycle, simply make them very vulnerable to infections. The forced marriage called widow's inheritance could be the fastest means of the spread of HIV in Nigeria.
- iii) **Poverty:** The inhuman practice of leaving a widow in the state of destitution, rejection and homelessness economically impoverishes a widow in addition to being the most oppressed, the most unheard voice, violated and invisible.
- iv) **Hardship:** Some widows resort to all kinds of menial jobs including prostitution to make a living. When the situation is unbearable, they may withdraw their children from schools, which may not help the matter. Invariably, there is rise in illiteracy level on the part of the children. This may later affect the workforce of the nation. Some, due to the intensity of their suffering, give out their very young girls for marriage exposing them to Vascular Vagina Facular (V.V.F).

Counseling Strategies

In adopting of appropriate counseling approaches, the following guidance services are vital in checking the incidences of widowhood afflictions. Such services include: appraisal, information, counseling, placement, orientation, referral and evaluation.

- **Appraisal Service:** Through the appraisal services, the widows unique challenges are identified, they also understand themselves including their strengths and weakness which enables them to gets insight into their circumstances.
- **Information Services:** It is a vital service in facilitating a rational planning on personal social goals and life generally. This service will afford widows where to go to obtain help and laid their complains such as human rights commission, non-governmental organisation.
- **Counseling Services:** The counseling service is described as personalized in the sense that usually, the problem brought by a widow is private in nature and requires some emphatic, confidentiality and warm atmosphere. Such problems may include emotional problems, self concept problems, issues of depression, lost of self worth, esteem, dignity, shame, anger which required counseling. This service is regarded as the heart of guidance services, since it provides a forum for interaction, a link between the widow and the counselor.
- **Placement Service:** The placement service involves the process of helping a widow to enter and make adjustment in the next stage of life development. This next step adjustment may involve steps towards further personal social adjustment into appropriate medical treatment and vocational skills training.
- **Orientation Service:** Widows are given orientation on how to adjust to their new status.
- **Referral Service:** Issues beyond the competency of a counselor for a widow may be referred to medical, spiritual, financial or legal personnel.

Evaluation Service: The service is designed to ascertain the extent to which the guidance service of a widow is a success or failure that may prompt adjustment for improvement where necessary.

It is during counseling that RET/REBT becomes useful to alter the erroneous thinking pattern of widows; and Albert Ellis' Rational Emotive Therapy (RET) could be adopted in counseling all the stakeholders such as family members, the fatherless children and widows themselves in that it stresses thinking, judging and concerned more with the dimensions of thinking. RET is a highly didactic, cognitive and behavior-orientated approach in that it emphasizes the role of action and practice in combating irrational and self-indoctrinated ideas (Adamu, 2015). It is the view of the authors that if the counseling strategies above are religiously abided by, coupled with skills acquisition, it would curb the incidence of widows' afflictions.

Conclusion

This paper focused on the causes, manifestations of violation of widows' rights, effects of the violation on widows. It is the view of the researchers that adopting the appropriate counseling technique such as the rational emotive therapy/rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) that deals with helping widows and their violators since behaviour is learnt and it can also be unlearned.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested:

Government should ensure that education for the woman, including the girl-child is pursued, made compulsory up to at least the senior secondary school.

Laws against dispossessing widows of their inheritance should be enacted and effectively enforced throughout the nation.

Guidance services should be provided using relevant counseling techniques, follow-up and referral where need be to widows and family members.

Seminars and workshops should be organized by government and non-governmental organizations with the mind of acknowledging the plight of widowhood and how to eradicate their afflictions through skills acquisition.

Invariable, there is urgent need for government who are law makers, counselors and non-governmental organizations to advance laws with the mind of eradicating widows' afflictions in the Nation Nigeria.

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