

Health Implications and Educational Media Strategies of Widowhood Practices in Niger State, Nigeria

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Abstract: The study examined the health implications and educational media strategies of widowhood practices in Niger state, Nigeria. The focus of the study was to find out if there is correlation between the widowhood practices in Niger state and their health implications. Three research hypotheses were formulated for the study. Descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The study population comprised of widows, widowers and everyone concerned with caring and management of widows. Three hundred widows were randomly selected among women in Niger state. Data for the study were collected through the use of self developed questionnaire that have been scrutinized and validated by some experts in the area of study. Test-retest reliability techniques was used to determine the reliability status of the instrument. A reliability result of 0.82 r was obtained, which showed that the instrument was reliable. Data collected were analysed with the use of frequency counts and pearson product moment correlation coefficient to show the direction of findings of the study. The result of the study shows that there were significant relationship between emotional, physical and social health of the widows and widowhood practices in Niger state. Based on the findings, the researchers recommend that state public and private health agencies and religion organizations in Niger state should mount a serious educational media campaign against inhuman treatment meted out to the widows. It was also recommended that women should be empowered and made to be self reliant to know their right during widowhood period.

Key words: Widows, widowhood practices, Takaba, mourning, confinement, isolation, seclusion

INTRODUCTION

Religion and culture are two inseparable and inter-related practices that guide day to day activities of people all over the world. Most of the cultural norms and values of the people are often products of their religion doctrines. People's religion practices reflect in their mode of worship, marriage system, funeral rites, naming ceremonies, child-rearing practices, nutritional practices, to mention but few.

Marriage for instance, is an age-long practice that unite a man and a woman together as husband and wife. Olusanya (1970) observed that marriage is a delicate social relationship between a man and woman that involve permanently living together with contract that defines the obligations between the two and any children that may emerge. Marriage enables the couples to come together and reason together to provide for physiological, social, economic and spiritual needs of the family. All enduring marriage ultimately ends with the death of either the husband, wife or both. Ashonibare noted that death is a

permanent deprivation of relationship and fellowship with a loved one. Kalu (1989) stated that bereavement is an objective situation of losing someone that is significant. This situation according to him has two characteristics features which are expression of grief and observance of mourning process. He added that bereavement has a disruptive nature because it negates God's purpose for ordaining marriage among couples. For this reason therefore, the loss experienced by the widow upon the death of her husband may be related to loss of companionship, loss of confidant, loss of a home and loss of the father of her children. A widow in the light of foregoing is a woman who survived her husband and has not remarried instead. Nwachukwu (1993) conceived that a widow from her perspective and plight is a person who by certain circumstances is in distress. He added that a widow is one who finds herself in the middle of the ocean of life, struggling to survive. She becomes lost in thought and afraid of what the future holds in stock for her. Widowhood period is a critical period of confinement erranding loss of beloved husband or wife, aimed at

surmounting courage to overcome shock and grief resulting from the loss. Kalu (1989) defined widowhood as the state of mourning the loss of one's husband or wife through death. He stated further that widowhood represents a life phase characterized by problems or losses which aged and by extension the young people also experience.

Parkes (1995) observed that widowhood is an issue that affects women than men. According to him, all evidences indicated that over the years, women are affected more severely than men financially, psychologically, sexually and socially. Saba (1997) observed that widowhood is the condition or state of a married woman losing her husband to death and life after the burial of the late husband. According to him, the widow in most of the tribes in Niger state is expected to commence the obligation of mourning the death of her late husband, after the rituals death and burial rite have been performed. A mourning woman or wife is not expected to attend any festival or ceremony. If she does, she will be seen as an irresponsible and unsympathetic woman, because the period is regarded as mark of honor or respect for the dead man.

Saba (1997) stated that widowhood period among the people of Niger state is known as Takaba which means confinement or mourning process by widow for 4 months and 10 days exclusively in a separate room. The woman observing the mourning is often placed under different restrictions such as not allowing to make conversation with people, not eating food prepared by other woman except those prepared by woman has experienced about widowhood, not allow to bath regularly and not changing cloth all the time, to mention but few. Going by the predicament of the widow during widowhood period, the period constitute the greatest source of psycho-social, the period for the children and the woman under confinement. Maryam asserted that widowhood is a sordid situation which merely allocated to the widow a position of societal scorn, disclaim and permanent membership of the wretch on the earth. To further establish the problems faced by widow, Aiken (2001) noted that the weak position and defenseless of the widow come to the limelight most prominently in the fact that the widow has no legal rights to the property of her husband, except if she has son, she continue to enjoy or have access to her husband property through that son.

The plight of widow was further captioned by Nzewi (1989) that the painful loss of husband experienced by widow often lead to an inner dichotomy such as the constantly reflecting back to memory of the happy past and the tragically altered picture of her lost happiness and

her hopelessness regarding the future. Widowhood period according to him is a period in which the emotional trauma and psychological stress become inevitable and very devastating. The death of husband exert deep emotional feeling and disturbance on the widow most especially during the widowhood period when the mourning wife was in a constant reflection of the past relationship with her dead husband. Nzewi (1989) posited that the emotional impacts of the death of a spouse has been rated cross culturally as the most stressful and devastating experience. He added that what a bereaved woman need most during the mourning period is emotional and psychological stability through understanding, support and comfort from all and sundry around her.

The attitudes of family members of widow's husband is one of the major factors that often make life unbearable for the mourning woman. The widow is usually end up being emotionally distressed as a result of all the unwholesome attitude. Afigbo (1989) emphasised that bereavement is particularly stressful for the widows, who are often marginalised and subjected to a lot of painful, humiliating and dehumanizing experiences following the deaths of their husbands. The death of husbands in some situation often means reduction in economic power and lead to stressful conditions and uneasiness on the part of widows. Sossou (2002) stated that the death of an husband or wife means a great deal of insecurity for the spouse left behind. Widowhood has been noted to be accomplished by a drop in economic wellbeing of the widows and widowers, which is usually stressful for both because of loss of support. Parkes (1995) and Adler *et al.* (1993) agreed that a widow can become isolated and suffer emotional and mental health problem due to problems and hardship experience by her.

In addition to existing cultural values imposition on the widow, the man-made laws did not favour the conditions of the bereaved women. Ojiako (1995) and Aniekwu (2006) observed that widowhood practices are water tight in most communities and women have been objects of discrimination by men and the laws men made. They added that these acts are never directed at widowers and no justification for such act in any culture.

Physical health problems associated with widowhood practices are quintessence of untidiness, hunger and starvation, brutality, denial of husband's property, physical pain or physical appearance. Nwachukwu (1993) observed that some areas do not allow the widow to bath for 1 month, others for three months and yet another for 1 full year. Nzewi (1989) emphasized that despite of obvious lack of personal hygiene, the widow is expected to have only one set of mourning dress (usually black

clothes) the widow is to sit in her seclusion room without movement at all time, this could make the widow to gain weight and prone to overweight and body fat and subsequent effect of cancer risk.

Social health problem such as neglect, abandonment, humiliation and marginalization were suffered by the widows. There are likely to have negative effects on the lives of the widows for example when a widow is abandoned, she may not be able to feed and provide basic human needs for herself and her children. This condition can lead to malnutrition and diseases. Connidis (2009) noted that the loss of a husband obviously creates problems for many women. Among the greatest problems are finances, loneliness and unfamiliar duties. Advocates of women's interest have done much in the past 20 years to sharpen people's awareness on the importance of gender concern. The international Conference of Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994 was a breakthrough. It established a new consensus on two fundamental point. Educating and empowering women and improving their status are essential to realizing the full potential of economic, political and social development. Empowering women is an important end in itself. And as women acquire the same status, opportunities are social, economic and legal right to protection against gender based violence, human well-being will be enhanced (Rao and Latha, 2006).

The inestimable implications of widowhood practices on the health and wellbeing of widows are enormous and has been the concern of all and sundry. It is as a result of this concern that the researchers have embark on this study.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine the health implications of widowhood practices among women in Niger state, Nigeria. It also set to assess the influence of widowhood practices on emotional health of widows in Niger state, Nigeria; find out the influence of educational media strategies on physical health or wellbeing of widows in Niger state, Nigeria. And finally to determine influence of widowhood practices on the social well being of widows in Niger state, Nigeria.

Research hypotheses:

- There is no significant relationship between emotional health and established widowhood practices in Niger state, Nigeria
- There is no significant relationship between physical health implications and established widowhood practices in Niger state, Nigeria

- There is no significant relationship between educational media strategies and established widowhood practices among women in Nigeria

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The target population for this study comprised of all couples, widows, widowers and everyone concerns with caring and tending for the widows. A combination of purposive and random sampling techniques was adopted in selecting the 300 respondents that participated in the study.

A self developed and structural questionnaire was the research instrument used for this study. Each questionnaire had two sections A and B. Section A focused on the personal data of respondents used for the study, while section B elicit information on the health implication of widowhood practice among the women in Niger State.

To ensure the validity of the instrument used for the study, the questionnaire used for the investigation were given to three experts and experienced research fellow in the Faculty of Education, Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education and Epidemiology and Community Health Department, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ilorin. All their suggestions were incorporated to the instrument, which make it to be a reliable instrument. The data generated from the study were analysed with inferential statistical and correlation coefficient (r) method of analysis.

RESULTS

The results and analyses of the findings are based on the responses of respondents to the questionnaires administered during the investigation.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between emotional health implication and widowhood practices in Niger state, Nigeria. Table 1 shows the results of coefficient of relationship between established widowhood practices and emotional health implication among women in Niger state. The result of the analysis revealed a correlation of 0.674 r as against the table value of 0.088. The earlier hypothesis that states there is no significant relationship between emotional health and widowhood practices is hereby rejected. This means that widowhood practices affect or influence emotional wellbeing of the widows in Niger state.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between physical health implications and widowhood practices among women in Niger state. Table 2 shows the

Table 1: Correlation coefficient of relationship between widowhood practices and emotional health implication among women in Niger state, Nigeria

Correlation	Cases	df	Mean±SD	Coefficient of correlation (r)	Table value	Decision
Widowhood practices	300	298	30.80±5.34	0.6746	0.088	Rejected
Emotional health implication			12.83±2.23			

Significant at 0.05 alpha level

Table 2: Correlation coefficient of relationship between widowhood practices and physical health implication among women in Niger state

Correlation	Cases	df	Mean±SD	Coefficient of correlation (r)	Table value	Decision
Widowhood practices	300	298	30.80±5.34	0.7308	0.088	Rejected
Emotional health implication			12.33±2.36			

Significant at 0.05 alpha level

Table 3: Correlation coefficient of relationship between widowhood practice and educational media strategies among women in Niger state, Nigeria

Correlation	Cases	df	Mean±SD	Coefficient of correlation (r)	Table value	Decision
Widowhood practices	300	298	30.80±5.34	0.5934	0.088	Rejected
Emotional health implication			9.21±1.82			

Significant at 0.05 alpha level

result of analysis of finding of relationship of widowhood practices the physical well being of widow in Niger state. The result of the analysis revealed a correlation of 0.7308 r as against the table value of 0.088. Since the calculated value is greater than critical table value, the hypothesis above is therefore rejected. This means that widowhood practices as seen from the above result influence physical health well-being of widows in Niger state.

Hypotheses 3: There is no significant relationship between educational media strategies and widowhood practices among women in Niger state. Table 3 shows the result correlation coefficient relationship between educational media strategies and widowhood practices among women in Niger state. The result of the analysis revealed a correlation of 0.5934 r as against the value of 0.088. The hypothesis earlier is hereby rejected. This means that educational media strategies influenced widowhood practices. It also affects the economic and have social health implication of the widows in Niger state.

DISCUSSION

In all, three hypotheses were formulated and use for the study. The findings from the tested hypothesis were analysis at 0.05 alpha level of significant. The result from hypothesis one showed a strong relationship between the widowhood practices and emotional well-being of the widow in Niger state. This mean that widowhood practices influence the emotional health of women in mourning confinement. This findings agrees with the position of Nzewi (1989) That emotional impact of the death of a spouse has been rated cross culturally as the most stressful and devastating experience. Parkes (1995) and Adler *et al.* (1993) corroborate the above position that a widow and become isolated and suffer emotional and

mental health problem due to and hardship experience by her. The finding and results of tested hypothesis two revealed that widowhood practices have strong relationship. This result is in line with Nwachukwu (1993) and Nzewi (1989) hygiene, the widow is expected to have only one set of movement at all time which could make the widow to gain weight and prone to overweight and body fat and subsequent effect of cancer risk. The result of tested hypothesis three shows that widowhood practices have significant relationship with social health and well-being of widow in Niger state. This finding agrees with the finding of Connidis (2009) that the loss a husband obviously creates problem for many women. Among the greatest problems are finances, loneliness and unfamiliar duties.

CONCLUSION

The finding from the study generally show that widowhood practices influence the health and well being of widows. Based on these finding, the following conclusions are drawn:

- Widowhood practices among women in Niger state often cause emotional health upset or problem
- Widowhood practices among women in Niger state influence the physical health and well-being of the women or widows in Niger
- That the influence of educational media on widowhood practices positively affects the social wellbeing of the widows in Niger state, Nigeria

RECOMMENDATIONS

After all said and done, this study will not be complete without proffering useful suggestions for correcting most of the lapses discovered from the investigation, these are some of the possible hints to correction of the problems:

- The state government, public and private health agencies and religious organization Niger state should campaign against all widowhood practices that are detrimental to health
- Educated women such as Women Right Advancement Protection Alternative (WRAPA) based in Niger state and other should be actively involve in campaign or enlightenment on the adverse effects of most of these practices in mosques, churches and other social organizations
- The role of women in the society should be reviewed and spell out to wear positive relation during and after burials of their husbands
- Women should be more empowered, encourage in education and self development to know their right from wrong, most especially in relation to marriage related practices

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