

IDENTIFICATION OF LEVEL OF STRESS OF NIGERIA WIDOWS THROUGH REHABILITATIVES COUNSELLING.

BY

DR. MRS EGBO, ANTHONIA CHINONYELUM

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS, FACULTY OF
EDUCATION**

**ENUGU STATE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (ESUT),
ENUGU.**

Abstract

This paper identified the level of stress of Nigerian widows with regards to age at bereavement, educational level and duration of bereavement variables. The researcher sampled a total of 865 widows purposively drawn from the three major ethnic groups of Nigeria namely: Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. The stress rating scale for widows (SRSW) developed by the researcher was administered to the respondents in their places of work, homes and various meeting places. The researcher used Frequency counts simple percentages and Analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistics to analyse the data. The results showed that majority of the widows had moderate experience of stress, (59.9%), while only 29.9% and 10.3% of the respondents experience low and high levels of stress respectively. There was no significant differences in the level of stress on the basis of age, educational level and duration of bereavement. From the findings, it was concluded that widowhood practices in Nigeria resulted to untold stress to widows. Based on the research findings, recommendations was made, among which is the establishment of a functional National Commission for Widowhood Affairs so as to look into the welfare of widow and save them from social, economic and psychological trauma.

Introduction

It is believed that the human society is an interactive community of people joined together by ties meant to ensure the sustenance and propagation of the human race. One of these ties is the institution of marriage, which is the union of mature man and woman who have agreed to live together for better or for worse until death do them part. Okoye (2001) believes that a well adjusted marriage is the dream of every couple and it is the responsibility of each to help to ensure that the emotional, economic support, companionship, sexual gratification and physical protection for each is guaranteed. The man and the woman in this relationship have enormous

responsibilities depending on their temperament and understanding. In marriage, men and women have sexual, economic domestic and power relationship with each other. Yet, certain roles are seen as purely, belonging to the husband and the wife, (Egbo, 2012).

Interaction between couples means the relationship existing between couples or even married people. Marital interaction means dyadic communication and exchange of ideas between the husband and wife. This relationship as far as marriage is concerned is expected to be cordial and reciprocal. These happiness existing in the family most often is disrupted by many factors, mainly death. Death is the forever

loss of a beloved one which is accompanied by grief or mourning depending on the level of a dear one like a spouse. Okoye (2001) stated that the death of a beloved one like husband automatically makes a wife a widow. A widow is a woman who has lost her husband to death and has not remarried. The widows constitute a special group because they are a sub-population set apart in some significant ways from other people. Kolo (2002) explains that widows belong to a special group socially distinct sub population differentiated from the general population by factors such as socioeconomic deprivation, geographic barriers and cultural differences. The death of a husband is usually mourned in all cultures but in different ways and degrees. She noted that Africans have strong belief and attachment to mourning which is manifested in the form of intense wailing, shouting and crying and most often losing control. Worst of these is the mourning expected of a widow who is secluded and isolated from the rest of the community in terms of the type of clothes to wear, denial of social life by limiting the number and type of people she has to talk with, what to eat and restricted in many way in the name of mourning.

The death of a spouse and its consequences in Africa is not the same for males and females. The agony and pain meted to the widow is severe in most cultures of Africa that most often the widow is accused of killing the husband so that she can stay with her purported male friends to enjoy the late husband's wealth, especially where the man has physical wealth and when it is obvious that the man depended on the woman for financial upkeep before his death. The woman is made to go through emotional stress of being left alone to mourn the husband once the funeral rites are concluded. The widow is left alone to take

up the responsibility of catering for her children after the husband's relations must have stripped her of all that was left by the husband. Recently, the plights of widows have become the source of worry in contemporary Nigeria that the counselors have to rise to these challenges to help in arresting the phenomenon in terms of coping. One wonders how some of these widows cope because it is known that some widows die after few months of widowhood. The plight of Nigerian widows seems to be naturally inculcated into the culture because of the belief in gender inequality. For instance, in Nigeria the widow is made to pass through harmful widowhood rites by older women with the belief that it brings purification and pacifications to the dead husband and if not done spells doom to the widow (Egbo, 2012).

Unfortunately, the death of a husband is perhaps the most devastating sources of domestic stress for the widows. According to George (1996), the death of a spouse initiates social, psychological and physical separations of a longstanding human attachment. As a result of the multiple economic, social, cultural, physical and psychological implications inherent in widowhood, this phenomenon is invariably considered a major stressor for the widow whose general being is made pathetic by our cultural inequality (Imam, 1991). The widow equally faces the problem of psychological warfare often experienced due to lack of emotional support, warmth, companionship, and sexual gratification previously provided by the deceased husband on occasion when nothing would seem to work right. The implication of the above is that the widow is bound to experience various dimensions of stress, which invariably constitutes stress level in the widow's life.

The cultural rules governing the age at which one can marry is the first of stress for women in almost all cultures of the world. For instance in Nigeria, it is seen as normal for men to marry women of 30 years and even 50 years younger than they are, while on the contrary it becomes abnormal for men to be married to women a day older than they are and even of the same age. Hence, the difference in life expectancy between the sexes make the women to be at a cross road in a number of ways, one of which is the that she could become a widow at an age when she is not expected to have been married. Regrettably age notwithstanding, she is expected to paddle her canoe and take up the challenges of caring for the children and herself with occasional from torment her husband's relatives (Egbo, 2012).

Lack of suitable marital partner is another issue for widow's stress. This happens when the woman marries a man not because she wills but because she is forced into such marriage and in such a situation she totally lacks the knowledge and support from the man even when he was alive.

Loss of identity is another issue that affects the widow's stress level. This is because, when her husband was alive, she had invested her identity in her marriage as a faithful housewife to her husband. However, with his death, she loses not only her spouse but also her marital vocation and identity. This is more pathetic when the woman cannot re-marry and has no gainful employment in which she could invest her time and energy (Gbenda, 1997).

Closely connected to loss of self-esteem is the fact that presence of her husband while alive, gave to her vicarious power or status. This is especially true of widows of the ruling class and wealthy husbands. For example, a widow accustomed to being treated specially because of the position or

social status of her husband, would suddenly become a nobody, once the husband is no more. It can thus, be seen that the stress of the widows, as they go through the widow-hood process will affect such areas as they psychological and social-economic aspects of their lives.

Statement of the problem

The incidence of bereavement has been found to be stressful for widows (Egbo, 2012), the same way it has been found that the resultant effects of bereavement are not the same way for males and females. The cultural inequality in Africa tends to adequately protect men from widowerhood stress unlike the women folk. Consequently, a number of studies have been carried out on bereavement, widowhood practice and widowhood stress.

Research Question

What are the percentages Of the Nigerian widows age at bereavement, educational level and duration of bereavement?

Hypothesis

The percentages of Nigerian widows stress levels on the basis of age of bereavement, educational level and duration of bereavement do not differ significantly.

Method

The research design adopted for this study was the descriptive survey method, which, according to Kerlinger (1998), is a research approach that focuses on people and their beliefs, opinions, motivations and behaviours. Thus, in an attempt to study the stress level of Nigerian widows the choice of descriptive survey is considered appropriate. The target population for the study was made up of widows from the three major ethnic groups of Nigerian (Hausa, Igbo & Yoruba). They were purposively sampled across the major ethnic groups from three former regional headquarters of Kaduna, Enugu and Ibadan and were 865

widows in number. The instrument used to collect data was called Stress Rating Scale for Widows (SRSW). The instrument was made up of two sections- A and B, section A sought demographic information while section B consisted four sub-sections meant to assess level of stress of the widows. These subsections were labeled: (i) Social-psychological Stressors; (ii) Financial stressors; (iii) Health and Emotional Stressors; and (iv) Authority and Responsibility Stressors. Each of these sub-sections had five items scored on a five point likert rating scale ranging from one to five.

The instrument was administered personally by the researcher with the help of three research assistants who were thoroughly trained on how to administer the instrument. The administration was

done at such places like the widow's meeting place, religious gatherings, co-operative society meeting centres and individual houses. In the scoring, the researcher used the five point likert rating scale. Thereafter, the researcher categorized the stress as experienced by widows into three levels low, medium and high with the score range for these levels being 20-45 (low), 46-74 (medium), and 75-100 (high) stress levels respectively. The data collected for the study were analyzed through three statistical analysis measures Viz: Frequency count, simple percentage and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by Age, Educational Level and Duration of Bereavement.

VARIABLES	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
AGE AT BEREAVEMENT		
25-35 years	235	27.2
36-55 years	366	42.3
56 years and above	264	30.5
Total	865	100.0
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL		
Primary six	355	41.0
Sec. Sch-NCE/OND	352	40.7
First degree and above	158	18.3
Total	865	100.0
DURATION OF BEREAVEMENT		
2-5 Years	397	45.9
6-11 years and above	468	54.0
Total	865	100.0

Table 1 shows that of the 865 widows used for this study 235 (27.2%) fell between 25-35 years of age, 366 (42.3%) fell between 36-55 years of age and 264 (30.5%) are 56 years and above. In respect of educational level, 355 (41.0%) of the respondents have primary six

certificate or less, 352 (40.7%) have at least Secondary School qualification but not more than NCE/OND qualifications while 158 (18.3%) possess either first degree or other higher education qualifications. In terms of duration of bereavement, the table indicates that 397

(46.0%) of the widows lost their husbands within 2-5 years, 468 (54.0%) between years and above.

The results of the data analysis are presented in three parts namely: 1. demographic data on the main research question B, 2. the report of data on the testing of the hypotheses generated and 3. summary of findings.

Table 2: Percentage of Nigerian widows age at bereavement, educational level and duration of bereavement.

Table 2 reveals that of the 865 widows studied in this research work, 258 (29.8%) report low stress level, 518 (59.9%) report medium stress level while 89 (10.3%) report high stress level.

VARIABLE	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
STRESS LEVEL		
LOW	258	29.8
Medium	518	59.9
High	89	10.3
Total	865	100.0

Table 3: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on stress level of Nigerian Widows on the Basis of age, Educational Level and Duration of Bereavement

Age	DF	S.S.	M.s	Cal.F.	Critical F.
Model	2	1400.86	700.43		
Error	862	230208.51	267.06	2.62	3.00
Corrected total	864	231609.38			
Duration					
Model	2	149.58	74.49		
Error	862	231459.79	268.51	0.28	3.00
Corrected total	864	231609.38			

Regarding hypothesis are the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on stress level of Nigerian widows on the basis of age, educational level and duration of their bereavement indicates that there is no significant difference in the percent of stress levels of Nigerian widows.

Discussion

Regarding research question one of which sought the percentage of Nigerian widows on age of bereavement, educational level and duration of bereavement it was found that these factors influenced widows reactions to spousal bereavement are age at bereavement.. By implication, studies on these variables pointed out to glaring difference among widows in their response to bereavement, widowhood and its attendant stress.

According to Nweke (1996), individual personal characteristics are known to be predisposing factors to stress. In the same vein, Gbenda (1997) contends that the society was displaying double standards because in forbidding remarriage, the society did not take cognizance of the widow's age at bereavement and by implication her sexual and financial needs ignored. It can thus be inferred that certain factors do influence widow's experience and adjustment to bereavement during widowhood. These factors according to Friedman and Rose man,(1974) Sanders,(1981) and Saple, (1991) include widow's age, childbearing status; social-economic status and duration of bereavement. Further, research findings showed that widowhood was fraught with stress and stress symptoms peculiar to widows.

These symptoms/stressors cut-across psychological, sociological and financial sources. These stressors are known to emanate from problems of marital

partners.

- i. Lack of suitable identity
- ii. Loss of personal identity
- iii. Loss of self-esteem;
- iv. Lack of emotional support; and
- v. Problem of financial constraints.

The hypothesis tested indicated that there was no significant difference among Nigeria widows in their stress level, on the basis of age at bereavement, educational level and duration of bereavement. Their stress level is possibly as a result of the general stressful nature of widowhood in Nigeria. A typical Nigerian widow was by tradition expected to undergo certain mourning rites and widowhood practices, to a great extent, constituted widowhood stressors, to the of their inherent deprivations. Thus, a widow's stress could be from any one or a widow because combination of these deprivations, economic constraint, lack of sexual partner (for sexual gratification), lack of warmth and emotional support and lack of suitable marital partner to satisfy her numerous needs.

Further more, the finding that there was no significant difference among widows in their stress level is possibly because majority of them (60.0%) expressed experiencing medium stress level. Coupled with this was the fact that most widows in Nigeria lived under pathetic social-economic and psychological conditions compounded by the practice of retrogressive and dehumanizing mourning/widowhood rites and customs. These practices merely accorded to the widow a position of public scorn and disdain, especially, in such societies like Igbo society where the wife was literally held responsible for the death of her husband.

However, while the finding of this study buttressed the submission of George

(1996) that there was age difference in grieving and adjustment, it refuted the claim by Gbende (1997) that widowhood has more and immediate negative effects on the health, social status and psychological state of young widows than older ones. On the contrary, the finding of this study was that older widows do not adjust to bereavement better than younger widows, it was equally clear from the findings of this study that, irrespective of age, educational attainment or duration of bereavement, widowhood is typically stressful to Nigerian widows. The findings of this study as earlier on highlighted have a number of implications for the society, the widows, the government and counselors.

Furthermore, the finding that widowhood is stressful irrespective of age, educational level and duration of bereavement implied that widowhood practiced in Nigeria generally fraught with problems. The implication is that, if a true democratic society is to be built, everybody from the government to the society, including counselors, must pay attention to the plight of widows in order to give them a true sense of belonging.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings and their implications on the society, the researcher therefore, recommended the following:

- 1) The Nigeria lawmakers (legislators) having legislate against all oppressive or barbaric mourning rites and widowhood customs that tend to heighten widowhood stress should monitor the implementation.
- 2) That the Federal, state and Local Government of Nigeria should provide functional basic

education to all citizens as specially the female folks to enable them understand their right and privileges in order to actively play their parts in a truly democratic society.

- 3) That the Government should establish a functional National Commission for Widow Affairs with social, legal, financial and educational advancement of widows as its focus.
- 4) That bereavement and widowhood counselling programme should be incorporated into the training syllabus of all prospective counselors. This is necessary for counselors to adequately meet the challenges of providing rehabilitative counselling to widows.
- 5) That Nigeria widows, no matter the age should be allowed the right to choose to remarry or not considering the fact that she is human and the Bible even allows that.

REFERENCES

- Egbo, A.C, (2012). *Issues in marriage, sex and family*. Enugu: Joe best publisher.
- Gbanda, B (1970), *The double standard-widowhood*. The counselor, 15 (1), 173-179.
- Goldman, S. & Lord, B (1983). *Widowhood*. Cambridge: M.A. Schenckman.
- George, I. N. (1996). *Stress management among Nigerian couples in the Journal of counselling* 14 (1) 13-40.
- Imam, A. (1991). *Ideology, the mass media and woman: A study from Radio Kaduna, Nigeria*. Inc.
- Nweke, C. C. (1996) *Multiple perception and attribution to mental instability in Enugu State; Implication for counselling Psychologists, Nigerian Research Anambra State Clubs International*.
- Kerlinger F. (1978). *Foundation of behavioural research*. New York: Rinehart and Winston Inc.
- Wiebe, K. (1987). *Alone through widowhood and beyond: A search joy*. London: Kindred Press.