

HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF WIDOW INHERITANCE PRACTICES AMONG THE OSHIMILI NORTH OF DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The culture of inheriting a widow has been practiced across societies to provide widows social security as well as social support. There is however people who see the practice as a form of denial of right which dehumanizes and dispossesses widows of their properties. The research explored the pre-modern psychological and socio-economic functions of widow inheritance practices at Oshimili North area of Delta state. It analyzed the contradictions of modernity and the contemporary dimensions of widow inheritance. Patriarchy and symbolic interaction theory were adopted for explanations. Data were gathered using both quantitative and qualitative methods (Questionnaire, IDI and FGD). A sample of 220 respondents including widowed and none widowed were randomly selected across 10 communities in the study area. Descriptive and correlation analysis was used to analyze data. Total of 32.7% and 18.6% disagreed/strongly disagreed that the practice do not provide psychological and socio economic protection to the widow and children as claimed. 49.6% and 24.1% agreed/strongly agreed that modern discoveries on health discouraged widow inheritance ($\chi^2 .044 \leq .05$). 48.2% and 31.8% respondents agreed/strongly agreed that there is the probability of contracting health problems in the process of inheriting a widow. Hence, 69.1% and 25.9% prefers the modern day practices that frown at widow inheritance. Conclusively, respondents faulted genuine-sustained benefits of widowhood practice in modern times in the study area.

Key words: Patriarchy, Widow Inheritance, Modernity, Health, Implications

Introduction

Millions of people experience loss of loved ones every year. Among the dead are sometimes one's spouse; someone whom they loved, cherished and lived with for many years. This leaves the spouse frustrated, traumatised and frightened. Widowhood is a traumatic experience but in some African societies, it is considered more as an experience of deprivation, subjugation and humiliation.

Among communities in Oshimili North and other parts of Nigeria, widow inheritance relegates women to the background and clearly robs women of their rights and privileges. In some African societies, widowhood is a traumatic experience in which the widows experience deprivation, subjugation and humiliation.

. The cause of this is the differentiation between men and women's role characterized by superior relationship in favour of men. It involves a hierarchy in which men are given greater leverage over decision making and resources than women. The result is a cultural setting that invariably promotes male domination and female subordination (Ahosi 2002).

The early form of family provides warmth, security and mutual support. Talcott Parson (1959), observed in his research that, personality stabilization and security that was once provided by couples is destabilized when one of the couples die. At such times almost all the responsibilities that was formerly shared becomes the responsibilities of one surviving partner. Friedrich

Engels (1972), in his book titled *The origin of the family, private property and the state* opined that as the mode of production changed, so did the family. Hence, changes in one social structure demands a concomitant movement with other parts of the system. Contradictions and conflicts arise as a result of a non concurrent development of these cultures and the implementation of these cultural practices

During the early stage of human evolution, Engels believed that the means of production were communally owned and family as such did not exist. Primitive society is characterized by promiscuity (primitive communism) from this promiscuous horde, the family emerged. Monogamous nuclear family developed with the emergence of private property. According to Haralambos and Holborn (2008) “the state instituted laws to protect the system of private property, and to also enforce the rules of monogamous marriage. This form of marriage developed to solve the problem of the inheritance of private property, property was owned by males and females in order for them to be able to pass it on to their heirs, there has to be certain legitimacy of those heirs. They therefore needed greater control over women so that there would be no doubt about the paternity of offspring”. Women in particular are oppressed, not because they are socialized into being passive but their work is appropriated within the family. Delphy and Leonard believed that the family is a patriarchal and hierarchical institution through which men dominates and exploit women. Economic and social constraint makes it difficult for women to escape from the patriarchal family pattern.

The History of Widow Inheritance Practices

According to Wikipedia world dictionary, “a widow is ‘a woman whose husband has died’”. The origin of widow inheritance practices is rooted in patriarchy. It is a culture that allows the subjugation of female by male folks. Right from the days of Jesus Christ in the Bible, women were accounted to be weaker than men based on the fact that they were made from the rib of that of a man. More still, in the Bible widow inheritance were practiced, a situation where Naomi married seven brothers after the death of her original husband. Formerly it was a comfortable practice as a way of life; the question that arises is what went wrong recently? The reasons are not farfetched; the challenges in its practice in modern times could be adduced to modernization and the complicated pattern of living. In pre-modern Delta North communities, women before marriage are not allowed to own landed properties, only unmarried women who are aged are given the opportunity to acquire wealth, it is therefore, a taboo for a married woman to claim to have acquired asset and properties when she herself is an asset. Acquired properties are owned strictly by the husband. At the death of the husband, she is disposed to all the properties and expected to be remarried within the family in order to benefit from these assets. Also in order to curb promiscuity, she is inherited to a man who will attend to her emotional and material needs. The practice of widow inheritance was therefore created and intended to care for their wife, who is married to a particular family after the payment of her bride price, thereby retaining the wealth that has been acquired by their late brother.

Widowhood Inheritance in Kingship Based and Industrial Society

As industrialization and modernization proceed, kingship based society and the classic extended family tend to break up and the nuclear family or some form of modified extended family emerged. Extended family thus replaced nuclear family.

.In early industrial family, family ceased to be unit of production, extended family submerged the economic function previously performed by Nuclear family, and there emerged also the symmetrical family, the separation of the immediate nuclear from the extended family. In a survey carried out in London in 1928, the result shows that, there was an increased employment

of women, decrease in male mortality, women refused subjugation and exploitation in the name of widow inheritance due to rise in standard of living based on gainful employment.

The principles of stratified diffusion explain much of the changes in family life in industrial society. Industrialization provides the opportunity for a certain degree of choice for the general masses. Presently we are within stages Four Family, where work becomes central rather than the home being central. People, family prioritize their job to their wellbeing, their relations and even their children are left to be cared for by nannies and house girls. This is made clear with the popular saying ‘my business is my life’ (Mclanalian and Booth 1991)

Sigmund Freud listed the findings of a number of American studies which seems to indicate that “children are harmed by single parenthood”. This means that children from single parents are less effective in the process of socializing their children. There exists a deformation in character of any child trained by a single parent. These studies also claimed that such children have lower earnings and experience, more poverty later in life as adults, also that children trained by mother only are more likely to become lone parents themselves in future, and that they are more likely to become delinquent and engage in drug abuse’ Haralambos and Holborn (2008). Observation has shown that children raised by lone parent largely turn to street kids either as prostitutes in the case of the girl child or a gang star, drug addict, with the likelihood of resolving to carrying arms. All of these behaviours may not necessarily be as a result of lone parent as a phenomenon per se, but these may be as a result of lack of effective control or be that of relative deprivation from their basic needs. They therefore seek for solace in other means in what Robert K. Merton called the “alternative means” devoid of the normative rules and norms. These alternative choices are carried out within a sub group.

The differences outlined above could stem partly from the low income of lone-parent families and not directly from the absence of the second parent from the household (Mclanalian and Booth 1991)

The relationship between social class and health implications of widow inheritance has been a major research field since the beginning of public health history. Many studies have identified the disparities in widow’s health among social classes, It is generally believed that the well to do widows are subjected to hard rituals or rather that they suffer more at the demise of their husband. This may be as a result of jealousy or the penalties for the widow not associating with the village people especially the women folk prior to the death of their husband. It becomes an avenue to make her pay for those years she has neglected them. She is been stripe of hygienic cloths, her life becomes regimented as well as controlled.

Rene Villerme (1782–1863), observed empirically, that variations in the degree of subjection and acceptance of widow to widow rituals across communities even in more educated communities were patterned by poverty and wealth. Observations of disparities in health, shows that, despite the varying degree of widow rituals, the poor suffers more health implications than the affluence ones. This is because the poor have nothing to offer, but the affluence widow may be drilled to extort money. In most cases the provision of excess food and drink blurred the senses of the people involved in making sure that the widow adhered strictly to the rituals. Often times those are assigned to monitor the widow turn to her advocate and guardian angels as a result for their personal interest from the so called influential widow. In any case, class is a determinant of the degree to which a widow is subjected to widowhood rituals.

Cashmore (1985) 'argues that, it is often preferable for a child to live with one caring parent than with one caring and one uncaring parent, particularly if the parents are constantly quarrelling (Haralambos & Holborn 2008). In modern society, widow inheritance has lost its functional bearing, social institution, writing of will in claiming property and upkeep of the family's property is preplanned (will writing) unlike the early and middle ages. Families live very far apart unlike the extended family settlement pattern that were closely knitted together' women who are participating in the labour force who are also economically secured view husband as a matter of choice rather than a financial necessity. To buttress this point, John Maciounis & Ken Plummer (1997) opined that;

Because of cultural and religious norms, superstition, fear and traditional resistance to cultural changes, the victims, who are women, condone these practices and seem to be complacent. Secondly, women do not only condone such gender-based violence but also perpetrate and perpetuate them by enforcing traditional laws and customs that infringe on the human and reproductive rights of widows and other women. (Amobi Linus Ilika & Uche Rose Ilika 2005)

Reactions to Widowhood

Grief; this consists of a pattern of physiological distress including sighing, shortness of breath, and tightness in the throat, fatigue and loss of muscular strength. The griever is occupied with images of the deceased, often feels guilty about real or imagined slights to the deceased and can be irritable and angry when others try to be soothing. (Lindermann, 1944). They experience depression and personality change like the case of generalized hostility or irritability, when they sink into a long-lasting depression, crying, depression, and difficulty in sleeping. Majority of the widow interviewed claimed difficulty in concentration, lack of appetite and reliance on such medication as sleeping pills or tranquillizers. Bowlby (1960), in (Fasoranti & Aruna 2000) isolated 5 fairly distinct stages as follows: Concentration directed towards the deceased Anger or hostility towards the deceased or others Appeal to others for support and help. Despair, withdrawal and general disorganization Reorganization and direction of the self toward a new love object. More also Kavanaugh,(1974) in his research findings suggests that, there are seven(7) stages involved in the grieving process: these are, Shock; Disorganization; Violent emotions; Guilt; Loss and Loneliness; Relief and Re-establishment.

Deborah Carr and Rebecca Utz provided an overview of findings from recent empirical research based on the CLOC study. Specifically, they presented findings on: (1) the implications of late-life longevity for bereaved spouses; (2) marital quality and its consequences for spousal grief; (3) social and daily-life adjustments to late life bereavement; and (4) "special event" grief. They summarized the research findings which highlighted the importance of their findings for policy and practice. Taken together, their research projects highlighted the importance of the three theoretical considerations outlined in their paper, that: the experience and consequences of widowhood are molded by macro social conditions, dyadic characteristics, and individual-level attributes; widowhood is a multifaceted process - not a dichotomous event; and responses to widowhood comprise a diverse array of psychological, social, and behavioral adjustments.

Widows have different odd feelings at the death of their spouse. First and foremost they become aggressive and becomes jealous of others while they ask the question, “why my own or why me”. Anger is considered particularly, a difficult symptom of loss, it is linked to social isolation and rejection of social support from friends and family, it is further compounded with the feeling of anxiety, being afraid of what is ahead, they feel anxious or unsettled, worried about how they would manage their day to day affairs. According to Deborah and Rebecca (2002), *in their summary of grief scales and subscales(Changing Lives of Older Couples Study,1987-1993)* they discovered that widows suffer from despair, to them life seemed empty inside, they feel life had lost its meaning, they experience shock, they hardly believe what is happening or has happened. They feel emotionally numb, they exhibit anger, feeling resentful or bitter about death, majority of widows feels death was unfair, some go the extent of blaspheming and expressing anger towards God

And most of all, there is a yearning to have him back, (longing to have him/her with you), painful waves of missing their spouse, feelings of intense pain and grief, feelings of grief or loneliness. An intrusive thought beclouds the widows, they experience difficulty falling asleep, and thoughts of their husband keep coming into their mind. They try to block out memories or thoughts of him, but often cannot get thoughts about him out of their head

Varying Degrees of Widowhood Practices

Having analysed the class dimension as a determinant to the degree of the treatment inflicted on the widow in the previous sub heading in the course of my review above, the question that arises and which demands an answer is, what are the benefits to be derived in practicing widow inheritance. Firstly, to have lost a spouse, the widow immediately loses her place in the family and most times she is abandoned, labeled as a murderer, a witch or man eater. They are in most cases ostracized and made destitute. In an attempt to avert rejection and untold hardship, the widow reluctantly accepts to be inherited. Suffering of widows in terms of their social, economic, psychological and human rights violations in Delta North among other societies is dehumanizing. Widows are “silent victims who suffer cruel and dehumanizing cultural and ritual practices in the name of mourning process for their dead spouses” (Marie–Antoinette Sossou 2002). Any attempt to reject the position of a “silent victim” results to such acts which could have more health deteriorating effects or outright banishment for suspicion of hidden agenda

Dimensions of Widowhood Practices in Nigeria

There are different dimensions of widow practices in Nigeria today. What is experienced as a widow in the Eastern part of Nigeria may be slightly different from that practiced in the Northern and Western region. The widow as matter of culture, undergo through many difficult ordeal. The legal human rights are contravened in trying to ensure compliance by implementers. The Banjul Charter enlisted various forms of human rights, these includes, the right to health, the right to be free of cruel and degrading practices, the right to sexual and corporal integrity, and the right to reproduction. A right to health is also provided for in Article 16 of the Banjul Charter, which states: that, “every individual shall have the right to enjoy the best attainable state of physical and mental health”. In addition, Article 18(3) declares that the state shall ensure the elimination of every form of discrimination against women and also ensure the protection of the rights of the woman and the child as stipulated in international declarations and conventions. The Nigerian women still live under punitive, demeaning and dehumanizing widowhood practices because the woman losses her husband. As a man would lose his wife, so is the woman, but there exist a wide gap between the treatment given to a man

and that given to the woman. The man is free to choose, and marry even before the interment of his late wife. An interview section held with interviewee no.2 revealed that;

“The ordeal of widows starts by been accused of killing the spouse, she may be forced to swear, eat or drink the water used in washing his corpse to exonerate her. Male are never accused according to an interviewee, the widow must morn her husband, she goes into seclusion for number of days months or years as decided by the family.

Like Odimegwu (2000), and Aderinto (2000), the researcher observed that, the interviewee number 2 also claimed that the widow wears black cloths, the widow is disowned, dispossessed of her husband property if she refuses to be inherited, she might be stoned to death if caught in sexual entanglement with any man outside their family. She is divorced if found to be using contraceptives after been willed. Widows lost their marital status if they venture taking a loan to support themselves. In traditional patriarchy, women lacked “LOCAL STANDIA” (legal standing) to own property and were not able to own property or earn their own living. They are sent to bath in the forest, her movement with her relations within and outside is monitored. The ability to cope with the grief of a dead spouse is determined by age, circumstance of death, state of marriage and the personality of the surviving spouse

The reasons why widows, young or old suffer untold torture, hardship and deprivations, including dispossession of life and properties from their husband's families remain an illusion. Since these punitive, humiliating and dehumanizing practices which are obtained in all the ethnic nationalities within Nigeria, it becomes a necessity for the Federal Government to legislate against these practices across the whole country. Effort should be geared towards stopping such practices forthwith. World Health Organization in (1946), defined health as the “state of complete physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. The death of a spouse subjects the widows to emotional sickness. Further practice of widow inheritance, reduces the woman to a property or asset which is exchanged from hand to hand. In the moral modern sense of it, the practice reduces the self worth of the widow; she is seen to be an excess load to a hitherto existing family. She losses her sense of belonging and she feels cast away. In case of any mistake or unwelcomed behavior, she will be reminded of her status. Any unpalatable occurrence in the family after her arrival into the new family under the arrangement of widow inheritance will be ascribed to be her ill luck brought into the family. WHO published that 19.2 million people are living with HIV/AIDS worldwide. 52% (1.3 million) deaths in 2000 were women. (Digun Aweto 2006) they contract these deadly diseases either through intercourse with an “unfaithful” spouse, through use of unsterilized shape object during child birth, and majorly through many of the traditional practices among which is widow inheritance. They are exposed to more health hazards as a result of these rites and rituals.

Research Questions

Based on the above, the following questions arises

1. How did the cultural practices of widowhood and wife inheritance originated

2. What was the function for which widowhood and wife inheritance practice was created in primitive community
3. What is the place of this practice in contemporary Delta North Community?
- 4 The implications of the obsolete endemic cultural practices of Widow Inheritance.
5. What are the policy implications of findings?

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to unravel the reasons for widow inheritance practices in the traditional society, as well as analyzing the modern values, reasons and their implications.

The specific objectives include:

- To examine the origin of the cultural practices of widow inheritance
- To examine the function of widow inheritance practices in primitive and contemporary Delta North communities.
- To examine the implications of the obsolete cultural practices of widow inheritance.
- Policy implication of findings

Theoretical Framework

To conceptualize and elucidate the myriad social implications and processes, resulting in different embodiment and its manifestation in widow inheritance population profiles, we need theory. This is because theory helps us structure our ideas, so as to explain causal connections between specified phenomena within and across specified domains. This is by using interrelated sets of ideas whose plausibility can be tested by human action and thought. Different theories could be used to account for what widow inheritance is all about.

The theory of functionalism could be applied to analyze the premodern intent of the practice. It helps to maintain sexual gratification and sanity for the widow and also provide socioeconomic function for the children. On the other hand, the theory of Karl Marx and Hegel could be used also to view its obsolete, exploitative, alienating and its contradictory nature in modern times. A situation where wealth and property conscription with little or no welfare provision are provided for the widow and the children is practiced. Nevertheless, the theory of choice that is used in explaining the subject matter of this research is the institutional or social structure theory that seem to legalize subjugation, alienation and further exploitation of women and widows.

Patriarchy

A basic structure of domination is intended either manifestly or in its latent form as a tool for domination and exploitation, as the case may be. It is not the unintended or secondary consequences of some other sectors like biology or social roles, but the intended function was that "property seizure". Patriarchy is maintained to compel the girl child/women to perpetual subordination, alienation and oppression. Gender difference and gender inequality are the byproduct of patriarchy. By domination, they are used to control, subjugate and oppressed women by men and few highly placed fellow women who act as custodian like the men. The Nigerian Woman under the patriarchal traditional system is coined under a culture that is predicated on patriarchal family patterns; where the male is seen as the head of the family, while the woman occupies a subservient position under him. 'The inferior position which they are been relegated, is as a result of age long cultural indoctrination producing the stereotype

which has been unwittingly accepted as norm (Oluyemisi Bamgbose2005). It is on the basis of this patriarchal system that the widow is subjected to untold hardship and inhuman treatment.

In the face of increased social ills such as poverty and economic in viability, the demise of the head of the household, mostly men, presents opportunities for the economic violation of women. Practices such as wife inheritance; (where a widow has to be inherited by a male relative of the man's family in order for her to retain her position within the family), as well as widow cleansing; (where a widow before being inherited is believed, needs to be cleansed of the spirit of the dead by engaging in sexual activities with a male relative of the deceased). Both practices of widow inheritance and widow cleansing becomes questionable in modern time. These were the ways of life used over two decades to survive themselves in their social enclaves. Society has become modernized, new ways emerged replacing the former patterns, yet, the benefactors of these practices forcedly enforce them, contravening the human right, which widows are also entitled to. Although the genesis of these practices (however patriarchal) were for economic reasons, mainly to secure the widows property by ensuring that "the man's" property stayed in her family for the support of herself and her children, increasingly it is these very practices that are being used as justification for her being stripped of the property that belongs to her and her children. Women who have refused to be inherited and thus opted out of the "protection" of her property offered culturally, have discovered that, they have everything including their land and homes. Only in very exceptional instances that showed that they were left with what is referred to as bride property (all things found in a kitchen) Any widow who suffers negative consequences as a result of widowhood practices is labeled guilty (Erinosh 2000, Digun 2006)

Materials and Methods

The study was located in Delta state of Nigeria among the Oshimili people of Delta North area. Delta North speaking people are located in Latitude 5⁰ and 7⁰ degrees North and 6⁰ and 8⁰ degrees East. The area consists of the following villages, Ukala, Ezi, Ebu, Illah, Okpanam, Ugbolu, and Awai, Akwukwu-Igbo, Ashama, Ugboodu and other neighbouring clans. The head quarter of the study area is Akwukwu-Igbo; the common Language of this area is Aniocha/Oshimili Igbo Dialect. They are generally referred to as the Enuanu people and are notable with the use of White cloth known as 'Akwaocha' (Tick White Cloth).

There is no central political organization among the Delta North people; traditionally, the village and clans are the basic political units. Major occupation is farming while yam, plantain and cassava are major crops. Social roles and function is gender based, they practice patriarchal family system where polygyny is a show of wealth and strength. Marriage within this region is seen as family affairs; hence a breakdown of a union is a failure on the entire family. They are highly fertile people and they also derive pleasure in giving birth to too many children. This is because; they strongly believe that many children mean brevity and wealth.

The population of the study area is estimated to about 48, 254. However, a sample of 1000 respondents was used for the study. The study area was delimited into ten different villages and are numbered accordingly. The purposive and random method of sampling technique was adopted. Randomization as a method of data gathering was to give everyone or household an equal chance of been sampled. Purposively, family heads and elders within the family were chosen as respondents. This is because; they are in the position to tell more of old cultural practices. Though the study is directed towards the widowed in the community, both the

widowed and none widowed alike were sampled. Sampling both the widowed and those not widowed was initiated to avoid any objective response, avoiding bias loaded experience exaggerations from the widowed. The researcher therefore, balanced the responses from widow who had a firsthand experience and the reality observation acquired by those who are not widows. The sample of the study is mostly household heads, the widowed, key traditional office holders and women leaders as well as religious authorities alike

Data for the study was generated both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitatively, the structured questionnaire was pretested and used to generate information. A total of 220 questionnaires for the study were divided evenly and administered across the ten delimited study areas. The distance between the delineated study areas called for the services of a research assistant. The questionnaire was distributed to household heads and others within the family where the head of household is found to be absent.

Qualitatively, the focused group discussion (A focused group discussion is a group that gathers together people of similar background or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest to the researcher (Darson et al 1993).) and the In-depth interview method were used to elicit information which the questionnaire cannot generate. It provided an opportunity for a deep expression of personal feelings or observation as the case may be. Both the FGD and the IDI method were adopted to balance responses with facial expression, the utilization of all senses in validating responses to avoid bias. The Focused Group Discussion consists of five (5) persons; this will bring out the opinion concerning the practice.

Data elicited by questionnaire was coded, coded data was cleaned, entered into the spread sheath and was analyzed with the aid of the statistical package for the social sciences, versions fifteen (SPSS 15.0 windows Evaluation). Both chi square test and correlation analyses were used to analyze the variables. The correlation coefficients were used to find out the relationship between the practices of widow inheritance and the performance of its acclaimed function. The chi square and percentage shows the proportion and the percentage of the respondents. Content analyses and summaries were used for focused group discussion and In-depth interview (IDI) responses analyses.

Discussions

17(7.7%) and 29(13.2%) agreed and strongly agreed to be affected directly or indirectly by widowhood practices. 126(56.8%) and 33(15.0%) respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed of been affected either directly or indirectly. 15(7.3%) respondents do not know whether they are affected or not. 89(40.5%) and 60(27.3%) respondents agreed/strongly agreed that the practice encourages polygyny, while 35(15.9%) and 30(13.6%) disagreed/strongly disagreed that the practice do not support polygyny The correlation coefficient of $-.146(*)$ is highly significant, that means the socio-economic and recent health discovery in modern times does not encourage polygyny . 111(50.5%) and 63(28.6%) respondents agreed/strongly agreed that polygyny could arise as a result of widow inheritance which encourages unhealthy rivalries, while 25(11.4%) and 15(6.8%) respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed with the fact that polygyny is a matter of individuals choice and values irrespective of community culture. The correlation coefficient of $-.160(*)$ at .05 is significant, this means that the practice of widow inheritance encourages polygamy and rivalry which do not encourage peaceful and healthy well being of the widow and her children if any

A total of 97(44.1%) and 54(24.5%) respondents making the sum, 151 agreed and strongly agreed respectively that under rigid role allocation, men and women especially may have difficulty fulfilling the task previously performed by their spouse. The correlation coefficient of $-.208(**)$ at .01 significant level shows that spouse find it difficult performing the duty

previously performed by their late spouse as a result of strict gender specification and role allocation in the community.

.8% and 22.3% respondents agreed/strongly agreed respectively that widowhood/widow Inheritance practices provides economic protection, (32.7%) and (18.6%) respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed as it were that the practice do not in any way provide psychological and economic protection to the widow and their children as the case may be, (4.5%) respondents do not have idea whether it provides protection or not. The above responses makes it clear that, these practices which were to protect women's economic viability after their husband's death, cannot be claimed as the protection measures which they were meant to be

The interview section with the interviewee, to her
“In the olden days, it worked, it was meant to prevent promiscuity, which could create problem and confusion in many homes as she may be exposed to many men who are likely to have been married. Emotionally, she will be satisfied, economically; she will be allotted a wing in the yam bane at the backyard and plot to farm. Financially and materially she is cared for”

Widows were found to have lower self-efficacy and higher levels of depression than widowers, notwithstanding the level of protection in our modern day technological advancement. 40(18.2%) and 28(12.7%) respondents agreed/strongly agreed that it is beneficial, while 110(50.0%) and 34 respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed that the practice is not beneficial to the widow and children. The correlation coefficient of 231 at .05 is highly significant showing that the relationship between the practice and the function for which it has been created are at variance.

54% and 11.8% respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed that the practice of widow inheritances does not provide shelter as claimed for both the widow and children against 20.0% and 9.5% who agreed/strongly agreed as it where, that it does provides shelter. 39.1% and 20.0% hold the belief that the ritual involved induces sleeplessness. It is crystal clear that, widow inheritance does not provide shelter for the family of the deceased spouse as claimed, especially when no structure was erected before the death of the husband, any occasion where the widow were sheltered; may be that it is based on the degree of the family's' wealth, generosity and as well as the level of affiliation that has existed between them before the incidence and not the culture per se.

An interviewee during the interview sections asserts that;
In recent time, the aim for which widow inheritance was created has been defected because; women are empowered and can now stand independently to fend for themselves even after the death of their spouse. She also acknowledged that the increased selfish nature of modern man has destroyed the aims for which the practice was created. Christianity and moral reasoning has placed a barrier to the practice. Geographical distance between families is/has distorted any arrangement as such”

Variable on stress revealed that (18.6%) and (12.7%) respondents agreed/strongly agree that widow inheritance practice reduces pain and stress for the widow and their children., (41.8%) and (18.2%) respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed that the practice do not in any way reduce pain of a dead spouse. This is because nothing can replace the vacuum, the affection, companion, compatibility and help that was once provided by the late spouse.

The following responses were derived from the interview held with interviewee No. 1:

“Widow Inheritance is rooted in the traditional values of her people among other villages around and the origin of the practice is embedded in patriarchal system. The practice of widow inheritance was necessary created in the olden days because women were not allowed to own landed property before and during marriage. After the death of their husband they find life more difficult, as they were not allowed to own farm land. Having little skills to sustain her and her children, the widow is then willed or forcefully handed over to a man within the family to fend for her social, economic and psychological needs to reduce stress as well pain”.

A five man focused group discussion was carried out. A response from the focused group discussion is presented below as narrated that;

“The degree and the Laverty enjoyed by a widow depend on her relationship with family of her spouse”. A cordial relationship prior the death of a spouse reduces the extent of treatment and ritual obligations. Also the level of intimacy and affection prior the death of a spouse is a determinant on the level of psychological, social and economic pains suffered by the remaining spouse.

The calculated percentage shows that 52 and 41 respondents agreed/disagreed respectively, while 93 and 19 disagreed/strongly disagreed that the practice does not provide care for the children of the late man. 15 respondents do not have any idea whether the children are cared for or not. It therefore implies that, widow inheritance do not adequately provide care for the children by the man inheriting the widow. Hence the essence of inheriting the widow has been defected in recent times. The correlation coefficient of $\chi^2(.359)$ at .05 is highly significant. From the data above it is clear that widow inheritance neither provide economic protection nor reduce psychological effect suffered by a widow as result of a dead spouse

The responses in the interview section revealed that the practice has outlived its function and are quoted as presented below:

“The practice has outlived its function, whether the woman is dependent or not. This is because inheriting a widow might be a source of depression and anxiety to the existing “legal” wife who has toiled with her husband. And more also, the present economic crisis do not encourage the practice because to her there could be transfer of deadly diseases. They are violations of human rights and could constitute criminal offences punishable by law In modern times the disadvantages outweighs the advantage”

The correlation coefficients are highly significant showing that the relationship between the practice and the function for which it was created are at variance. The believe that widow

Inheritance practices do provide socio-economic and psychological support is refuted, therefore widow inheritance do not provide the care needed by widow and the children of the late spouse, accepted.

From result majority of the respondents that nuclear family pattern has replaced the extended form of family affinity. 69.1% and 25.9% respondents agreed/strongly agreed respectively that Nuclear family pattern has replaced the former practice of extended family relationship, 2.7% and .9% respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed while 1.4% seems not to have idea. The correlation of χ^2 is highly significant at .05. 52.2% and 32.7% respondents agreed/strongly agreed that home and work were not separated in pre-modern times. 11.4% and .5% agreed/strongly disagree that home and its chores were different from formal work outside the home. 48.2% and 19.1% respondents prefer the modern family to pre-modern family values which encourages widow inheritance practices and its inherent vices, 14.1% and 6.8% disagreed/strongly disagreed. 11.8% respondents do not have idea about the modern family pattern. Appropriately, home and work are distinctly separated in modern time.

45.0% and 24.5% respondents agreed/strongly agreed respectively that in modern time's family members stay far apart, 14.1% and 11.4% disagreed/strongly disagree that family live far apart in modern times. The correlation analysis of χ^2 (.006) is significant at .05. in the above table also 56.5% and 26.0% respondents agreed/strongly agreed that Nuclear family replaced the former practice of extended family relationship, while 9.5% and 5.9% disagreed/strongly disagreed. The Correlation coefficient of (.133*) at .05 is significant; that is, nuclear family has replaced the extended family pattern 52.3%; 32.7% agreed/strongly agreed that home and work were not separated in pre-modern era, 11.4%, .5% disagree/strongly, 54%, 22.7% agreed/strongly agreed 16.4%, that large industry emerged displacing family members and further differentiating home from official work. 5.0% disagree/strongly disagree

52.9% and 37.3% respondents agreed/strongly agreed respectively that female education increased to a reasonable level, thereby improving their social status, hence, enhancing their employment opportunity at work places in modern times, while 7.3% and 52.3% respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed. The Correlation coefficient of χ^2 (.278 **) at .05 is significant. In essence, female status has increased, enhancing their independence which may not call for or breed a necessity for the situation of implementing widow inheritance at the death of a spouse.

Slightly more half, (50.5%) and (18.6%) respondents reported that geographical distance lead to environmental isolation and less need for extended family for mutual aid, while (17.7%) and (7.3%) respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed respectively. The Correlation coefficient of .194(**) at .05 is significant. Which implies that the recent search for better source of livelihood creates a distance between and within family which was once closely located thereby reducing the need for aid of any kind. The reason for this distanciation may due largely for a search in better life and greener source of livelihood. Hence, as individual matures and develops themselves in a particular locality dominated by close relations, they migrate to main cities and towns, and in most cases they move to foreign nations where life is a little easy and devoid of some of these crazy culture that could be injurious and murderous

(60.0%) and (29.1%) respondents agreed/strongly agreed respectively that in modern times men and women choose their spouse based on affection, standard and compatibility. (5.5%) and (3.6%) disagreed/strongly disagreed while 4 has no knowledge about this. The Correlation coefficient of χ^2 (.066) at .05 shows that the test is significant. It is encouraging that virtually

majority of the respondent were aware that spouse are chosen based on “True” love(affection), than it is taken as a tradition. Therefore, male and female alike can decide to remain single if there is a delay or if they were unable to discover their perfect match. In a five man focused group discussion, participant Number two (2) believed that;

“In Modern day, monogamy and faithfulness becomes the norm. Men choose who to care and relate with in general and woman in particular emotionally on the basis of affection and passion. Both male and female are educationally inclined, equipped to work and accumulate landed property as well as plan or write a will for up keep of the remaining spouse and children. Working class and religious women find it difficult accepting this tradition. This has created conflict and in most cases, rejecting and ejecting from family house or banished. This has led to many widows dying out of frustration from in-laws rather than the pain and trauma of a loved one. In modern time’s one man, one wife is preached, families are scattered apart, women liberation and women court of law has contradicted the practice.’

49.6% and 24.1% respondents agreed/strongly agreed that modern discoveries on health do not encourage widow inheritance, while 15.0% and 7.7% disagreed/strongly disagreed. The correlation coefficient of $\chi^2(.044)$ at .01 is significant. Therefore the recent transfer of HIV/AIDS threatens the practice of widow inheritance as there could be the probability of transferring/transmitting the deadly disease.

From the correlation analysis which were highly significant, shows that modern life pattern contradict these cultural practices

69.1% and 25.9% making a total of 95.0 respondents prefer the modern day practices devoid of widow inheritance, while 2.7% and .9% respectively disagreed/strongly disagreed that the practice should continue as it is or could have been beneficial to some widows. The correlation coefficient of .136 is highly significant at .05 For the question on if there is the need for the continuation in the practice of widow inheritance, the interviewee said

“to me I would not want to be inherited” she claimed that she has labored and made investment with her husband, ‘any man who inherits me is not inheriting a liability or going to care for me and children’, therefore, she sees no need to be inherited. But to her it might be beneficial to those who do not have means of livelihood.

Form the calculated percentages and the correlation coefficients which are highly significant, the assertion that there is need for the continuation of these practices is refuted. People prefer the modern family to widow inheritance. Properties should be left for the up keep of the widow and children. They should be allowed the freedom and choice of partner if they so wish.

Conclusions and Policy Implications of Findings

There is evidence to suggest that with increasing modernization and with the spread of education, patterns of life and affiliation have/are changing. (Onugu 1994) There are positive

and negative sides to these cultural and traditional practices. Positively, widows are supported in some instances to get over the hurt; thereafter they may be left to their fate. Negatively, the practice reduces widows to mere property whose duty were strictly expressive, (providing pleasure), even before the death of the spouse, she is materially and emotionally exploited, alienated from her husbands' property which in most cases, she is a part of crew in acquiring those property through joint effort. And they may be finally eliminated from their husbands' family meetings and functions. The demonstration of excess grief, the shaving of hair, confinement to one place and dressing in old black cloth are meant to make present unattractive to prospective admirers; these reduces her self-esteem and reaffirms the notion of female domesticity. The notion of sexual purification and inheritance is exploitative and could be seen as an infringement on private life which really can be offensive to the individual and morally inappropriate in modern times. The culture cannot be bad in entirety, according to the research findings, it has helped people with emotional needs after the death of spouse, it is the modern culture and human nature that put a hinge in the practices. Members of the discussant rejected widow inheritance for fear of HIV/AIDS. Some support it for economic reasons. If given alternative sources of economic empowerment they may think differently. Those who accepted to be inherited did so for the following reasons, out of fear of ejection from husband's house, for economic reasons, for social stability and protection for their children, the need for sexual satisfaction and need for more children. A policy making these practices optional should be made. Violators should be made to face penalty by the state.

Nevertheless, the extent to which a widow suffers psychological trauma after the death of a spouse is dependent on the type of death. An accidental death sends shock and cold feelings; this could lead to mental derangement depending on the level of coping shock absorbent capacity of that spouse. But a prolonged illness gives a preparation and this reduces the level of trauma.

However, the research findings condemn the bad aspect of the customs and traditions, a culture that preaches the subjugation of one category of people at the death of a spouse is unproductive and detrimental to the people's development. Any custom that is repugnant to justice and good conscience is a bad culture and should be abolished or reformed. Hence, negative aspects of widowhood practices have to be abolished. They are violations of human rights and could constitute criminal offences punishable by law; the United Nations offered the first official definition of such violence when the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. According to Article 1 of the Declaration, violence against women includes any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life.⁶ It affects the physical, social, reproductive and mental wellbeing of victims. Because of cultural and religious norms, superstition, fear and traditional resistance to cultural changes, the victims, who are women, condone such violence and seem to be complacent. Secondly, women do not only condone such gender-based violence but also perpetrate and perpetuate them by enforcing traditional laws and customs that infringe on the human and reproductive rights of widows and other women. Today democratic system of government which guaranteed individuals rights to own practice and freedom of choice and voice against what was practiced then already contradicts these practices in recent time. The death of the head of a household, mostly men, presents opportunities for the economic violation of women.

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