

## **INFLUENCE OF WIDOWHOOD PRACTICES ON THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH OF WIDOWS IN SELECTED STATES OF SOUTH-EASTERN, NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The study investigated the influence of widowhood practices on the physical, psychological and social health of widows in selected states of South-Eastern, Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of all the 4,879 registered widows from the three selected states; Imo, Anambra and Abia. Sample size of 370 registered widows was purposively drawn from these states. Research instrument was a structured questionnaire tagged: Widowhood Practices and Health Questionnaire. Reliability was determined using cronbach alpha, the following scores were obtained: Physical Implication Subscale 0.77, Social Implication Subscale 0.76, Psychological Implication 0.643, Economic Implication 0.87. percentage, frequency were used to answer the research questions while Analysis of Variance and z-test were used to answer the null hypotheses. It was found out among others that widows were ritually shaved of their hair on pubic region and head, they were forced to swear to prove their innocence, forcing widows to marry their husbands' relatives and economic hardship. It was recommended among others that younger widows, that is, those bereaved before the age of 35 years should be encouraged to remarry, as a way of integrating them properly into a social inclined society like Nigeria.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Widowhood is a sordid situation that befalls women after the death of their husband. The harmful rituals associated with this widowhood have lots of serious implications on the health and general wellbeing of these widows. In view of this fact, this study therefore intends to look at the implications of these ritual practices on the physical, psychological and social health of widows, as well as their economic implications.

In Nigeria, just like other patriarchal societies, women are regarded more as appendages to their husbands. They lack right to ownership of property, they face lots of inhuman traditional practices harmful to their health, such as female genital mutilation and widowhood rituals which both old and young widows are compelled to undergo as part of mourning their dead husbands, (Odimegwu and Okemgbo, 2003). Mourning and burial rituals are inherently left for women to suffer when ever a man dies. This situation presents a traumatic, painful, and regrettable experience all over the world, but worse in developing countries including Nigeria, where there are lots of these obnoxious practices and rituals (Odimegwu and Okemgbo, 2003).

A widow in the Nigerian context refers to any female, married under native law and custom or under the marriage Act or any other law recognized in Nigeria, whose husband has died, and has not remarried (Amasiatu, 2009). A widow refers to a woman whose husband has died and who has not remarried, while widowhood is the state or period of being a widow or a widower (Foluso, 2011).

Widowhood rites, as practiced in many traditional African societies, are the practices that accompany the mourning of the loss of one's spouse. The period of mourning is coupled with a series of life events which often have wide-ranging implications. Some of these practices are variously described as barbaric, atrocious, backwards, immoral, commoditization and an abusive violation of the sexual and human rights of powerless" (Nyanzi, and Sossou, 2002). A typical Nigerian widow is by tradition expected to undergo these serious mourning rites and widowhood practices which is an enduring period of deep rooted agony, seclusion and exclusion, anxiety, deprivation, restitution, trauma, insecurity and pain, all these have lots of social and health implication to the widow (Amasiatu, 2009).

Widowhood has a brutal and often irrevocable harsh economic impact on the widow's children, especially the girl child. Poverty may force widows to withdraw children from school, exposing them to exploitation in child labor, prostitution, early or forced marriage, child trafficking, and hawking.. Widowhood rites enforced on widows mete out different kind of losses and inevitably expose them to economic hardships, confinement and ill-treatment (UN 2001). Lopata (1972) has done extensive research with more than 1000 widows and widowers. According to the finding, a major problem for both sexes is economic hardship.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In some societies, the death of a husband makes the wife lose some of her pride and glory, especially positions assumed after the husband's status. She becomes an object of maltreatment. The widow's status traditionally changes from womanhood to widowhood. The pathetic state of widows is often worsened by some cultural expectations, norms and deprivations. The physical and psychological violence inflicted on widows as part of the traditional burial rituals of cleansing have lots of implications on the health of the widow who is most times traumatized and battered. The children too, who themselves have become less protected share in their mother's pain, especially if they are still young. In some cases, they are chased out of their father's house with their mother, after the death of their father. This poses a great problem to the larger society to which these children belong, as some of them may not continue with their education because of the financial constraint. Some may become violent due to harsh experience or take to some other social vices.

Several researchers such as Owolabi and Onibokun (2011) and Azumah (2010) have conducted researches on widowhood practices in various parts of the world, including Nigeria, but the researcher noted a gap in the area of health implications of these widowhood rituals/practices on the general health and wellbeing of these widows, in the South Eastern part of Nigeria. Based on this observation, the problem of this study is to investigate influence of Widowhood Practices on the Physical, Psychological and Social Health of widows in selected states of South Eastern Nigeria. The study will also examine the influence of age, educational status and location of the widow, on these widowhood practices.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The main aim of this study is to investigate the influence of widowhood practices in the selected states of South Eastern Nigeria on the Physical, Psychological and Social Health of widows in selected states of South Eastern Nigeria.

The objectives of the study are to determine the following:

1. The various widowhood practices among widows in South Eastern Nigeria.
2. The perceived physical implications of these widowhood practices on the widows.

3. The perceived psychological implications of these widowhood practices on the widows.
4. The perceived social implications of these widowhood practices on the widows.
5. The perceived economic implications of these widowhood practices on the widows.

### Research Questions

The study is guided by five research questions:

1. What are the various widowhood practices in selected states of Igbo land, South East Nigeria?
2. What are the perceived physical health implications of widowhood practices among widows in the selected states of Igbo land, South East Nigeria?
3. What are the perceived psychological health implications of widowhood practices among widows in the selected states of Igbo land, South East Nigeria?
4. What are the perceived economic implications of widowhood practices among widows in the selected states of Igbo land?
5. What are the perceived social health implications of widowhood practice among widows in the selected states of Igbo land?

### Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were proposed for the study and were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference in the perceived physical, psychological, economic and social implications of widowhood practices among widows in selected states of Igbo land with respect to age.
2. There is no significant difference in the perceived physical, psychological, economic and social implications of widowhood practices among widows in selected states of Igbo land with respect to educational status.
3. There is no significant difference in the perceived physical, psychological, economic and social implications of widowhood practices among widows in selected states of Igbo land with respect to location.

### METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design. The population of this study covered the geographical entity of South-Eastern Nigeria. The area is made up of five states namely Imo, Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi and Enugu States. Out of the five states, three states were randomly selected for the study namely: Imo, Anambra and Abia. The population of the study consisted of all the registered widows in the three selected states (Imo, Anambra and Abia). Specifically, in Imo state there are a total number of two thousand, eight hundred (2800) registered widows (Imo state Ministry of Women Affairs and Social development, 2012), while in Anambra state there are a total number of one thousand and eight registered widows (1008) (Anambra State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, 2011), with a total number of one thousand and seventy-one (1071) registered widows in Abia state (Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development). In view of the ongoing, the actual total population of the study stood at four thousand, eight hundred and seventy-nine (4879: Imo – 2008, Anambra – 1008 and Abia 1071, respectively) registered widows in the three states selected for the study.

The population obtained from the three states was 185, 111 and 74 from Imo, Anambra and Abia States respectively, making it total sample size of 370 registered widows from the three states. Simple random sampling was used to select three states while purposive sampling technique was used to select registered widows. The data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled “Widowhood Practices and Health Questionnaire (WPHQ)”. The instruments were then subjected to Cronbach Alpha and the following respective scores were gotten: Physical implication 0.77, Social implication 0.76, Psychological Implication 0.643, Economic Implication 0.87, Age: 0.74, Location 0.67 and Educational status 0.84. The data collected for this study were analyzed using frequency, percentage (%), mean ( $\bar{x}$ ), standard deviation (SD) for the research questions. Hypotheses one and two were tested using ANOVA and hypothesis three was tested using z-test at 0.05 level of significance.

## RESULTS

### Research Questions

**Research Question One:** What are the various widowhood practices among widows in Igbo Land, South East Nigeria?

**Table 4.6: Widowhood Practices in Igbo Land, South East Nigeria.**

S/ N	Questionnaire Statements	Responses			
		Yes		No	
		F	%	F	%
1.	Ritual shaving of my hair on pubic region and head	286	77	84	23
2	I was forced to sleep alone in the same room with the husband's corpse for days to prove my innocence.	272	74	98	26
3	I was not allowed to see sympathizers/visitors during my mourning period	194	52	176	48
4	I was forced to swear to prove my innocence over my husband's death	255	69	115	31
5	Forced to marry any of my husband's relations against my wish	253	68	117	32
6	I was locked up in the same room with my dead husband's corpse to prove my innocence	237	64	133	36
7	Forced to drink the water used in bathing my husband's corpse	182	49	188	51
8	I was made to weep and wail occasionally throughout the mourning of my husband	253	68	117	32
9	I remained in confinement for a period of time after my husband's burial	217	59	153	41
10	I was forced out of my matrimonial home by in-laws	240	65	130	35
11	I was dispossessed of my husband's property and even property we jointly owned.	235	64	135	36
12	I was starved of good food during the mourning of my husband	256	69	114	31
13	I was restricted from going to certain places during the mourning of my husband	270	73	100	27
14	Broken plates were used to serve me food.	256	69	114	41
15	I was forced to have ritual bathing of cleansing	111	30	259	70
16	I was severally accused of causing my husband's death	122	33	148	67
17	I was not allowed to bathe for certain period of time during the death of my husband	213	58	157	42
18	I was not allowed to cook my own food	231	62	139	38
19	I was not allowed to see my husband's corpse before burial	233	63	137	37
20	I was discriminated against by people during my mourning period.	219	59	171	41
21	I was forced to sit on the bare floor for as long as my husband was not	221	60	149	40

	buried.				
22	I was sexually abused by the husband's male relatives	241	65	129	35
23	I was forced to wear one particular mourning dress during the mourning period	205	55	165	45
24	I was forcefully disinherited of my own biological children	269	73	101	27
25	I was made to wear dirty dress/always look haggard, and move about in a pity of misery.	215	58	155	42
26	I was regarded as a witch and purveyor of evil	236	64	134	36
27	I was forced to occasionally praise-name husband besides his grave	137	37	233	63
28	I was not allowed to spend the night outside my matrimonial home throughout the mourning period.	130	35	240	65
29	I was made to occasionally prepare special dishes for the Umuada (my husband's female relatives)	223	60	147	40
30	I was forced to eat kola nut rubbed on my dead husband's mouth as a proof of innocence	221	60	149	40
31	I was not allowed to wash my hands before eating	175	47	195	53
32	I was forced to jump across my husband's coffin to prove my innocence	194	52	176	48
33	I was not properly fed	214	58	156	42
34	I was forced to dance around the corpse before the burial	232	63	138	37
35	I was made to sit on a mat spread on the floor for a period of time	214	58	156	42
36	I was forced to apply mud on the edges of my two eyes	230	62	140	38
37	I was not allowed to buy/sell or continue my business throughout the mourning period, which is my only means of survival	197	53	173	47
38	I was always monitored anywhere I went	249	67	121	33
39	I was sent back to my father's house because I did not have a male child.	253	68	117	32
40	I was abandoned and not taken care of by my husband's relatives.	262	71	108	29
<b>Total</b>		<b>265</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>28</b>

Table 4.6 of the study documents forty (40) questionnaire statements that were used to address research question one. Yes and No response options were employed to adjudge the response to be either in favour (Yes) or against (No). Given the standard percentage of (100) fifty percent (50%) was established to be the accepted benchmark for the questionnaire items in line with the research question.

Data on the various widowhood practices in Igbo land, South East Nigeria as revealed by the result above showed that in item 1, majority of the respondents representing 77% stated that they were ritually shaved of their hair on pubic region and head compared with 23% stated they were not. For item 4, majority of the respondents representing 69% stated that they were forced to swear to prove their innocence while 31% stated otherwise. Item 5 also had majority of the respondents 68%, stating that they were forced to marry any of their husband's relations against their wish, while 32% stated that they were not. For item 6, 64% which represented majority of the respondents, stated that they were locked up in the same room, with dead husband's corpse to prove their innocence, while 36% stated that they were not. Equally, item 8 had 68% of the respondents which was a majority stating that they were made to weep and wail occasionally throughout the mourning period, as against 32% that stated that they were not. For item 10, 65% which was majority, stated that they were forced out of their matrimonial homes by in-laws, compared with 32% that stated that they were not. For item 11, 64% majority stated that they were dispossessed of their husband's property, while 38% stated that they were not. Item 12 had 69%, which was a majority, stating that



they were starved of good food during their mourning period, 31% stated that they were not. For item 13, 73% which was a majority, stated that they were restricted from going certain places during the mourning period, but 27% stated that they were not. Item 14 had 69%, which was a majority, stating that broken plates were used to serve them food, while 31% stated that they were not. In essence, 34 items in all, had above 50% which implied that the widows accepted that majority of those practices are in existence.

**Research Question Two:** What are the perceived physical health implications of widowhood practices among widows in the three selected states in Igbo land, South East Nigeria?

**Table 4.7:** Perceived physical implications of widowhood practices among widows in Igbo land, South East Nigeria.

S/N	Questionnaire Statements	( $\bar{x}$ )	SD	Rank order	Decision
1	Drinking the water used in bathing the corpse exposes us to serious infection and sickness	3.18	1.10	1 <sup>st</sup>	Accepted
2	Excess grief exposes us to serious cardiovascular diseases like heart failure	2.93	1.06	4 <sup>th</sup>	“
3	Subjecting us to incarceration leads to overweight and obesity.	2.80	0.99	8 <sup>th</sup>	“
4	Eating with unwashed hands has caused us diseases such as diarrhoea, amoebic dysentery, typhoid fever and cholera.	3.09	1.05	2 <sup>nd</sup>	“
5	Battering causes us physical body pains and wounds	3.06	1.09	3 <sup>rd</sup>	“
6	Some of these maltreatments have led to the death of some widows.	2.89	0.98	7 <sup>th</sup>	“
7	Forcing us into levirate marriage with someone whose health status is unknown, has caused HIV/AIDS and other STDs to the widow.	2.93	1.06	4 <sup>th</sup>	“
8	Confinement causes us arthritis and other heart problems.	2.64	1.01	9 <sup>th</sup>	“
9	Starving us of food makes us malnourished and exposes us to deficiency diseases	2.93	0.94	4 <sup>th</sup>	“
<b>Average mean and standard deviation scores</b>		<b>2.94</b>	<b>1.03</b>		<b>Accepted</b>

Criterion mean= 2.5

Table 4.7 revealed that the nine statements were accepted in favour of research question two. The basis of accepting all these items is because their respective mean scores are above the criterion mean score of 2.50. Therefore, with respect to research question two, the perceived physical health implications of widowhood practices in Igbo land revealed that widows perceived that drinking of water used in washing their husbands' corpses. The average mean and standard deviation scores of 2.94 and 1.03 respectively confirm that there is far reaching physical implications of widowhood practices on widows in Igbo land.

The rank order statistical tool was used to identify the order of physical health implications of widowhood practices as perceived by widows in Igbo land. In descending order of magnitude; item 1 ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, item 4 ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>, items 5 ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>, while items 2, 7, and 9 ranked 4<sup>th</sup> each, and item 6, 3 and 8 ranked 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> respectively.

**Research Question Three:** What are the perceived psychological health implications of widowhood practices among widows in the three selected states of Igbo land, South East Nigeria?

**Table 4.8:** Perceived psychological implications of widowhood practices among widows in Igbo land, South East Nigeria.

S/N	Statements	( $\bar{x}$ )	SD	Rank order	Decision
1.	Isolation/Confinement exposes us to lots of grief, boredom, anger, mental torture and hallucination	3.18	0.89	1 <sup>st</sup>	Accepted
2.	Forcing us out of our husband's house leads us to hopelessness, mental stress, destitution and grief	3.12	0.99	2 <sup>nd</sup>	“
3.	This emotional violence meted out to us, causes high blood pressure and some nervous breakdown.	3.01	1.00	3 <sup>rd</sup>	“
4.	Discriminating against us subjects us to desperation, depression and frustration	2.83	1.02	8 <sup>th</sup>	“
5.	Much punishment causes us emotional fatigue and memory loss.	2.82	1.06	9 <sup>th</sup>	“
6.	Constant accusation over our husband's death subjects us to shock, sleeplessness and pounding heart, misery and regret.	2.88	1.16	5 <sup>th</sup>	“
7.	Sleeping alone with my husband's corpse causes fear, panic phobia, anxiety, shock and heart attack.	2.98	1.11	4 <sup>th</sup>	“
8.	Forcing me to marry my husband's relative against my wish, leads me to perpetual marital unhappiness and frustration.	2.85	1.13	7 <sup>th</sup>	“
9.	Disinheriting us of our children causes serious pain, heart attack and sometimes leads to mental disorder.	2.88	0.98	5 <sup>th</sup>	“
<b>Average mean scores, standard deviation</b>		<b>2.95</b>	<b>1.04</b>		<b>Accepted</b>

\* Criterion mean= 2.5

Table 4.8 revealed that the nine statements were accepted in favour of research question two. The basis of accepting all these items is because their respective mean scores are above the criterion mean score of 2.50.

The rank order statistical tool was used to identify the order of psychological health implications of widowhood practices as perceived by widows in Igbo land. In descending order of magnitude; item 3 ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, item 8 ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>, item 1 ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>, item 4 ranked 4<sup>th</sup>, items 6 and 9 ranked 5<sup>th</sup> each, and items 4 and 5 ranked 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> respectively. The average mean score and standard deviation scores of 2.95 and 1.04 respectively, confirms the gross acceptance of the items that addressed the psychological health implications of widowhood practices on widows in Igbo land.

**Research Question Four:** What are the perceived economic implications of widowhood practices among widows in the three selected states of Igbo Land, South East Nigeria?

**Table 4.9:** Perceived Economic implications of widowhood practices among widows living in urban and rural areas in Igbo land, South East Nigeria

S/ N	Questionnaire Statements	Mean ( $\bar{x}_1$ )	SD	Rank Order	Remark
1	Denying us access to our husband's bank account makes us wallow in poverty.	2.97	1.08	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Accepted
2	We have no rights of inheritance to any of our husbands' property and this renders us helpless and hopeless.	2.82	1.07	7 <sup>th</sup>	“
3	We are often left destitute upon the death of our husbands.	2.58	1.05	9 <sup>th</sup>	“
4	We are discriminated from working in the public sector and this affects us economically.	2.85	0.95	5 <sup>th</sup>	“
5	These widowhood practices restrict us from gaining access to land, income and income generating opportunities and as a result we are helpless and impoverished.	2.56	0.99	10 <sup>th</sup>	“
6	Restriction and extensive mourning customs cause us serious economic problem and worries.	2.87	1.02	4 <sup>th</sup>	“
7	Most of our children have dropped out of school due to hardship and lack of support.	2.63	1.03	8 <sup>th</sup>	“
8	We are often generally impoverished as a result of death of our husbands.	2.89	1.00	3 <sup>rd</sup>	“
9	Some widows have become beggars as a result of economic hardship	2.85	1.00	5 <sup>th</sup>	“
10	Some of us send our children out to hawk or as hired servants, due to economic hardship, and this poses great danger to their lives.	3.08	1.07	1 <sup>st</sup>	“
<b>Average Mean and Standard Deviation Scores</b>		<b>2.81</b>	<b>1.03</b>		<b>Accepted</b>

Criterion Mean= 2.5

From the foregoing, the result from table 4.9 indicates that all the items were accepted by widows as perceived economic implications of widowhood practices in Igbo land. The basis for accepting all these items is because their respective mean scores and mean set values are above the criterion mean of 2.50. Also, the average mean score and standard deviation scores of 2.81 and 1.03 respectively, confirms that the widows accepted all the items.

The rank order statistical tool was used to identify the order of economic implications of widowhood practices as perceived by widows in Igbo land. In descending order of magnitude; items 10, 1, 8, 6, 4 and 9, 8, 2, 7, 3 and 10 ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10 respectively.

**Research Question Five:** What are the perceived social health implications of widowhood practices among widows in the three selected states of Igbo Land, South East Nigeria?



**Table 4.10:** Perceived social implications of widowhood practices among widows living in urban and rural areas in Igbo land, South East Nigeria

S/N	Questionnaire Statements	( $\bar{x}$ )	SD	Rank order	Decision
1	The dress code of widowhood makes people discriminate against us.	2.74	0.97	7 <sup>th</sup>	Accepted
2	We are often seen as outcasts.	2.65	0.95	9 <sup>th</sup>	Accepted
3	We suffer a lot of oppression and depression.	2.76	0.92	6 <sup>th</sup>	“
4	We are often not allowed to belong to any social group.	2.66	0.93	8 <sup>th</sup>	“
5	We are often accused of being responsible for our husbands' death.	2.85	1.15	3 <sup>rd</sup>	“
6	As a result of our husband's death, we are oppressed and exploited.	2.15	1.21	10 <sup>th</sup>	“
7	We are not allowed to associate with others on the burial day of our husband or eat anything cooked.	2.89	1.00	2 <sup>nd</sup>	“
8	We are often not allowed to talk in public gatherings.	2.94	0.98	1 <sup>st</sup>	“
9	We are often treated as strangers	2.85	1.01	3 <sup>rd</sup>	“
10	We are hardly recognized in family meetings.	2.80	1.04	5 <sup>th</sup>	“
<b>Average mean and standard deviation scores.</b>		<b>2.73</b>	<b>1.02</b>		<b>Accepted</b>

Table 4.10 of the study documents data used for the analysis of research question four which bothered on finding out the perceived social health implications of widowhood practices in Igbo land. Specifically, all the items were accepted by the widows as having implications on the widows' social health, except item 6. This assertion is based on the fact that each item had a mean score greater than the the criterion mean of 2.5. But item 6 has a mean score below 2.5.

The rank order statistical tool was used to identify the order of social health implications of widowhood practices as perceived by widows in Igbo land. In descending order of magnitude; item 8 ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, items 7, 9 and 5 ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> and third respectively. Items 10, 3, 1, 4, 2 and 10 ranked 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>

### TEST OF HYPOTHESES

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant difference in the perceived physical, psychological, economic and social implications of widowhood practices among widows in selected states of Igbo land with respect to age.

**Table 4.11:** Summary of two-way ANOVA of widowhood practices in Igbo land and Age

Source of variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	Mean Squares (MS)	Degree of freedom (df)	F ratio	F cal	P-Value	Decision
Between Groups	1207.188	402.3958	4	0.14	3.49	0.93	Accept Ho (F< F-crit) Not Significant
Within Groups	34214.75	2851.479	366				
Total	35424.94	3253.8748	370				

Not significant

The result of hypothesis was reported in table 4.11. The result revealed that the values of F ratio and F crit are 0.14 and 3.49 respectively. Based on the decision rule, F ratio (0.14) is less than F crit (3.49); hence the null hypothesis is accepted. This implies that age has no significant influence on the widowhood practices among widows in Igbo land of Nigeria.

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant difference in the perceived physical, psychological, economic and social implications of widowhood practices among widows in selected states of Igbo land with respect to Educational status.

**Table 4.12:** Summary of two-way ANOVA of educational status and widowhood practices in Igbo land

Source of variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	Mean Squares (MS)	Degree of freedom (df)	F ratio	F crit	P-Value	Decision
Between Groups	1622	811	3	0.13	4.26	0.88	Accept Ho (F< F-crit) Not Significant
Within Groups	56763	6307	367				
Total	58385	7118	370				

Not Significant

Table 4.12 of the study reports the result of the second hypothesis which sought to test the significant influence of educational status on widowhood practices among widows in Igbo land. This test was conducted using 3 degrees of freedom for between groups and 367 degrees of freedom for within groups. Based on the decision rule, F ratio (0.13) is less than F crit (4.26); hence the null hypothesis is accepted. This implies that educational status has no significant influence on the widowhood practices among widows in Igbo land of Nigeria.

**Hypothesis Three:** There is no significant difference in the perceived physical, psychological, economic and social implications of widowhood practices among widows in selected states of Igbo land with respect to Location.

**Table 4.13:** z-test Analysis of the influence of location on Widowhood practices in Igbo land

S/N	Categories	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Total	DF	Alpha level	Z-cal	Z-tab	Decision
1.	Urban Area	163	2.77	1.00	451	368	0.05	-0.19	±1.96	Accept the null hypothesis (Ho) ( $ z_{cal}  <  z_{tab} $ ) Not statistically significant
2.	Rural Area	207	2.79	1.00	577					

The result presented in table 4.13 showed. The mean score of responses of widow responses of widows living in urban ( $2.77 \pm 1.00$ ) and rural areas  $2.79 \pm 1.00$ ). The result also revealed the value of  $z_{cal}$  and  $z_{tab}$  at  $-0.192$  and  $1.96$  respectively. This shows that the value of  $z_{cal}$  is less than the values of  $z_{tab}$ , thereby suggesting the acceptance of null hypothesis. This therefore means that location has no significant influence on widowhood practices among widows in Igbo land, South East Nigeria. This means that irrespective of where a widow is, if

she is subjected to widowhood practices, she is bound to experience the implications of the practices.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **The Various Widowhood Practices among Widows in Igbo Land, South East Nigeria**

The various widowhood practices in Igbo land as reported in table 4.5 revealed that widows were ritually shaved of their hair on pubic region and head (77%), they were forced to swear to prove their innocence (69%), they were restricted from going certain places during the mourning period (73%), they were abandoned and not taken care of by their husband's relatives (71%), they were starved of good food during their mourning period (69%), they were forced to marry any of their husband's relations against their wish (68%), they were forcefully disinherited of their own biological children (73%), they were sexually abused by their husband's relatives (65%), they were forced out of their matrimonial homes by in-laws (65%), and they were dispossessed of their husband's property (64%). These findings were similar to previous studies.

In line with the findings, Azumah (2010) and Yager (2010), Amasiatu (2009) noted that in Ghana, widows are forced to undergo purifying rituals that range from bathing in cold water, sitting naked on reed mats, ritual scarring, head shaving, and even having sex with a designated individual. Again, Okoye (1995), Nzonankeu (2011), Afolayan (2011) and (Azumah, 2010) observe that the widow is expected under customary law to carry out practices as confinement, dethronement, made to sit on mat around the corpse while laid in state, defacement, ritual cleansing and proof of innocence.

### **Perceived Physical Health Implications of Widowhood Practices among Widows in the three selected States in Igbo land, South East Nigeria**

The findings to this research question underscore the prevalence perceived physical problems of widowhood practices on widows in Igbo land. These negative physical implications could be attributed to a number of factors such as drinking the water used in washing the corpse, excess grief, incarceration, eating with unwashed hands, battering, levirate marriage, confinement, starrng and emotional violence. Another dimension to the ordeal of widows is the psychological health implications of widowhood practices. Empirical evidence Agumagu (2007), Anakwe (2004) and Chima (1996) abounds that most of these implications are as a result of forcing the widows to marry their husbands relatives against their wishes, isolation much punishment, constant accusation, sleeping alone with husbands' corpses, forcing them out of husbands' house and disinheriting them and their children.

**Perceived Psychological Health Implications of Widowhood Practices among Widows in the three selected States of Igbo land, South East Nigeria** leads to perpetual marital unhappiness and frustration, isolation/confinement exposes them to grief, boredom, anger, mental torture and hallucination. To item 13, forcing them out of their husband's house leads to hopelessness, mental stress, destitution and grief; while sleeping alone with their husband's corpses causes fear, panic phobia, anxiety, shock and heart attack; again, disinheriting them of their children causes them serious pains, heart attack and sometimes leads to madness; constant accusation over their husband's death subjects them to shock, sleeplessness and pounding heart; the widows said that discriminating against them subjects them to desperation, depression and frustration. Much punishment causes them emotional fatigue and memory loss; in line with the above findings, Oniye (2000) stated that widowhood is also

associated with intense grief and anger expression, especially among more widows than the divorced when compared together.

### **Perceived Economic Implications of Widowhood Practices in Igbo**

Perceived economic practices include wallowing in economic hardship, poverty, impoverished, discrimination from working in the public sector, family burden, begging practice, followed by helplessness and hopelessness, the widows children are dropped out of schools, and destitution. Lending support to these findings, Lopata (1972) observed that when the husband of a widow dies or otherwise, the major problem for her is economic hardship.

### **Perceived Social Health Implications of Widowhood Practices among Widows**

Perceived social health implications of widowhood practices in Igbo land include discrimination, regarded as outcasts, oppression and depression, dissociation from social groups, restriction from talking in public gatherings; they are treated as strangers and hardly recognized in family meetings. In line with these findings, Ahousi (1997) made submission that it is an obvious fact that widowhood practices subject woman particularly to discrimination, exploitation and oppression are perceivable problems experience by widows.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Younger widows, that is, those bereaved before the age of 35 years should be encouraged to remarry, as a way of integrating them properly into a social inclined society like Nigeria.
2. Governments should establish a National Commission for Widow Affairs as a way of fostering widows' empowerment in the society. And also provide support system for these widows such as scholarship for their children.
3. Health education programme should be put in place to educate widows on health implications of these harmful traditional practices.
4. Government at three tiers establish massive public enlightenment programmes to educate the public on the health implications of these widowhood practices on the widows, their children and society at large. They legislate a serious punishment for the defaulters.
5. Forceful levirate marriages against the widow's wish must be stopped.
6. The government at the state and local levels should establish Widowhood Trust Fund (WTF) and other non banking institutions that could grant credit facilities to the widows so as to enable them to be socio-economically relevant in their communities.

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