

Psycho-demographic determinants of widow-maltreatment in Mbaitolu Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study was aimed at finding out some psycho-demographic determinants of widow maltreatment in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State. Specifically, the study sought to verify the extent to which wife's age, length of marriage and economic viability of the widow determine widow maltreatment in the area. The population for this study comprised all widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State. The sample for the study was 200 widows drawn from the various communities in the Local Government Area using accidental and purposive sampling techniques. Three research questions which transformed to three hypotheses, guided the study. It was found out from the study that widows pass through some traumatic experiences following the death of their husbands. Statistical analyses showed that wife's age, length of marriage and economic viability of the widow do not significantly determine widow maltreatment among widows in the area. Based on the findings, recommendations were made, among others that widows who are still young and marriageable after the death of their husbands, should be encouraged to remarry if they so wish, as this may reduce the level of pain and harassment from people.

Keywords: psycho-demographic (age, length of marriage and economic viability) and widow-maltreatment

Introduction

Being bereaved of a spouse, and subsequent mourning and burial rituals in parts of Igbo land, including Imo State, Nigeria are intrinsically gendered; often times to the disadvantage of the woman. Widowhood is a situation-induced status that can befall both the man and the woman; however, it appears the rate of trauma and challenging experiences arising from this loss of a spouse is greater among women than men who lose their wives.

This situation comes with distressing, painful, and lamentable experiences for the woman. There are lots of these obnoxious practices and rituals in most other developing areas like Nigeria, (Odimegwu and Okemgbo, 2003). Widowhood often portrays a heart breaking moment in the life of a woman, because at such period, her identity is usually stripped away following her husband's death (Akimbi, 2015^[3]; Young, 2006)^[20]. In some African societies, as noted by Ezeakor, (2011)^[6]; Ezeilo, (2001)^[7]; Jackson, (2003)^[10]; and Korieh, (1996)^[11], the moment a woman becomes a widow, mourning her husband for a particular period of time becomes a mandatory expectation from her. UN Women (2000) and Beyond (2001) noted that widows around the world share three similar experiences, namely; the loss of self-dignity and social recognition, social exclusion and deprivations that ultimately lead to poverty.

A woman whose husband died and who has not yet married again, may be referred to as a widow, while the state or period of being a widow or a widower is widowhood (Foluso, 2011)^[8]. During this period, the bereaved person mourns their loss and in many places they are expected to go through series of ritual practices often known as widowhood rites/rituals. For the woman, the process of widowhood is surrounded by the observance of some kind of rites. Though these ritual practices vary from one culture

to another in Nigeria. There is also variation of practice and some noticeable differences even among the Igbos. Hence the demise of the husband signals varying archaic, anachronistic and abhorrent practices in the name of culture (Nwogu, 2015)^[14].

However, mourning of the dead husband by the wife is regarded as a very important ritual in Imo State, especially in Mbaitolu LGA of Imo State which the surviving spouse/s must observe to honour the dead. Following the demise of the husband, the wife becomes a widow and the mourning rites begin almost immediately the husband dies. This is often preceded by weeping and wailing by the wife. One outstanding feature of this is the intensity of wailing and weeping which death generates or is expected to generate. The children and other relations would also join, or are expected to join in the wailing together with other friends of the family. After this stage, the wife becomes the main focus in terms of mourning the departed husband. Much demand is made of her in terms of mourning to show her pain or concern for the husband's death.

Okorie (2005), observed that in some parts of Igbo land, where the wife was divorced, she is expected to return to mourn the man and perform some rituals of posthumous reconciliation with him in the presence of the matrilineal daughters often referred to as umuada, or else she is believed to be in danger of incurring the wrath of the deceased man. Furthermore, Okorie asserted that the wife of a titled man is often not allowed to cry or make any noise until proper arrangement is made. What this implies therefore is that the widow is forced to repress the natural psychological grief in her, which ought to flow naturally, merely for the fact that her husband had a title while he was alive. The danger of this is that it will obviously have some psychobiological repercussions on the poor widow.

In some cases, the moment the husband dies, the wife is

seen to be unclean, and so likely to contaminate her and others. By this thinking therefore, no one touches, or is expected to touch her or even get so close to her except her fellow widows, who are equally believed to be defiled. She is equally not allowed to eat any food cooked or brought for the funeral ceremony. It is feared that she will die if she eats such foods. Hence, her food during the funeral ceremonies is cooked separately.

Sometimes, the widowed woman mourns her husband within certain period of time which usually lasts for upward of six months to one year, depending on the area. Throughout this period, she is expected to be mourning her husband in clothes with particular color usually black, or more recently white; probably with her hair shaven or left unattended to. Nwoga (1989)^[13], noted that as a rule in the process of mourning, it is not permitted for the woman to talk to any man, prepare her food or carry out any work; to even go on with her regular business, sometimes takes long time. The foregoing made Agumagu (2007)^[1] to aver that widowhood practice in Igbo culture appears to be an exclusive preserve for women and not the men. This, according to him is because a widower has no traditional laid down laws governing his mourning rites.

The way widows are treated in Mbaitoli LGA of Imo State, and the rituals they go through, seem to have many similarities in the rituals which widows in some other parts of Eastern Nigeria undergo. However, there may be variation in the intensity of the ritual from one culture to another. But one of the universal signs of a widow's bereavement is the scrapping of her hair by the Umuada. These are the women related to the dead man, whose roles are very outstanding and exclusively unique in the widowhood rituals, and who in most cases, if not all the cases, are themselves widows. They ensure that the widow keeps all the cultural demands. Often times, the level of cruelty inflicted on the widow depends on the relationship she has with her husband's relatives. Apparently, this female subjugation is inherently culturally-embedded and arises from the assumed inferior status to which women are accorded, unbalanced involvement of women in political and social activities; extending also to economic circles (Nwogu, 2015)^[14]. In connection with these, is also the fact that women are treated as objects of rights, rather than subjects of rights and so are depersonalized (Otaluka, 1992)^[19]. Therefore, widows are made to bear double trouble of loss of their husbands, which may even be at the early stage of marriage, as well as go through some agonizing cultural rites of mourning their husbands (Arinze-Umobi, 2008)^[5].

Concept of Widow/Widowhood

The period of widowhood is usually surrounded with superstitious beliefs, particularly given the fact that it has connection with death. One of such beliefs as noted by Nwokoro (2016) is that the spirit of the dead husband spirit still hangs around the widow for some time before moving on to the land of his ancestors. Then at this period, the widow is considered unclean and defiled; and so should not be in touch with people apart from her other widows. So for a safe passage to the other phase of life, that is, from marriage to widowhood, Nwokoro further noted that these women are forced to undergo series of rituals for cleansing. Once a man or woman loses a spouse, such a person is considered a widower or widow. Widower refers to a man that has lost a wife, while widow is the woman. Generally

speaking therefore, a widow may be explained as a woman who has been separated from her husband due to the death of the husband Agumagu (2007)^[2] refers to a widow as a woman who has lost her husband by death and has not remarried. For Townsend (1995), a widow is a woman whose partner in marriage is dead and who has not married again. The condition of. Widowhood as put forth by Nnachi and Nnubia (2011)^[12] is that in which a woman finds herself at the death of her husband. Within Nigerian context as averred by Amasiatu, (2009)^[4], a widow refers to any female that had been married under native law and custom or under the marriage Act or any other recognized law in Nigeria, whose husband has died, and who has not remarried. In the words of Offuru (2000), a widow is that woman whom society expects to crawl around in pity of misery, wearing that psychotic look of mourning in order to get human sympathy, perhaps for emotional healing.

Traditionally, the death of a man converts the wife's title from womanhood to Widowhood (Ihekwaaba, 2014), and she often loses her pride and glory. Thompson cited in Onyeakazi (2007)^[18] defined a widow as a woman whose husband is dead and has not married again, that is, a wife bereaved of her husband. Thompson further explained widowhood as the state or condition of a widow (female) or widower (male) Nwoga (1989)^[13] averred that a woman becomes a widow when her husband dies and from that point of the husband's demise, the widowhood practices begin. These practices he defined as series of expectations to action and behaviour by the widow and rituals performed by or on behalf of the widow from the time of the death of her husband.

Statement of the Problem

Following the death of her husband, the wife often loses some of her pride and glory particularly some of those positions she assumed in line with her husband's status while he was alive. Some cultural expectations and norms exacerbate the state of the widow. Though on the average, almost every Nigerian widow may be traditionally expected to submit themselves to certain mourning rites and widowhood practices, however, the extent to which widows experience some of these widowhood rituals may depend on certain factors such as educational level, relationship with husband's people, length of marriage, age, level of economic independence of the widow after the husband's death, etc It is possible that older widows, who may have grown-up children to assist and comfort them at the time of bereavement, may appear more stable to bear the loss. But younger widows may have to suffer sexual abuses by the husband's relatives and other men who see them as being without a protector. Also, it is expected that an educated widow knows her right than an illiterate widow and will be ready to defend herself to some extent. Economically empowered widows can equally salvage her situation and continue her children's education after the death of her husband. On the other hand, the extent to which a widow is maltreated usually depends on some psycho-demographic factors. In view of this, the problem of this study therefore is to find out the psycho-demographic determinants of widow-maltreatment in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State.

Objectives of The Study

The aim of this study is to find out the psycho-demographic

determinants of widow maltreatment in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State. Specifically, the study was designed to:

1. Find out the extent to which wife’s age determines widow maltreatment.
2. Determine the extent to which length of marriage determines widow maltreatment.
3. Ascertain the extent to which economic viability determines widow maltreatment.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent does wife’s age determine widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State?
2. To what extent does length of marriage determine widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State?
3. To what extent does economic viability of the widow determine widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. Wife’s age does not significantly determine widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State.

2. Length of marriage does not significantly determine widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State.
3. Economic viability of the widow does not significantly determine widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State.

Methodology

The population for this, study comprised all widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area. There is no existing record on the population of widows in the area. However, the sample was drawn from the various communities in the Local Government Area which included: Ifakala, Mbieri, Ubomiri, Ogbaku, Eziama Obiato, Umunoha, Orodo, Afara and Ogwa. The population was all married women in the area whose husbands were dead. The sample for this study was 200 widows’ drawn using accidental and purposive sampling techniques.

Results Presentation

Research Question one: To what extent does wife’s age determine widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State?

Hypothesis one: Wife’s age does not significantly determine widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo, State.

Table 1: Z- test analysis of age as a determinant of widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area.

Age	N	X	Std Dev.	Df	z-cal	z-crit	alpha level	Result
Below 40	100	1.07						
				198	0.11	1.960	0.05	Not Significant
Above 40	100	2.77	1.08					

The z-test analysis on age (younger and older widows) as a determinant factor of widow maltreatment indicated that the z-calculated is 0.11, which is less than the z-critical of 1.960. In view of this, the null hypothesis that wife’s age does not significantly determine widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State is accepted, while the alternate rejected. Thus, wife’s age does not significantly determine widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo

State.

Research Question Two

To what extent does length of marriage determine widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State? Hypothesis Two: Length of marriage does not significantly determine widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State.

Table 2: Z- test analysis of length of time as a determinant of widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area.

Length of Marriage	N	X	Std Dev.	Df	z-cal	z-crit	alpha level	Result
Below 20 years	100	2.82	0.98				0.05	
				198	0.34	1.960		Not Significant
Above 20 years	100	2.90	1.09					

The z-test analysis on the length of time of marriage (below and above 20 years) as a determinant factor of widow maltreatment showed that the z-cal is 0.34 which is less than the z-crit of 1.960. The null hypothesis that length of marriage does not significantly determine widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State is accepted and the alternate rejected. Thus, length of marriage, does not significantly determine

widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State. Research Question Three: To what extent does economic viability of the widow determine widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State? Hypothesis Three: Economic viability of the widow does not significantly determine widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State.

Table 3: Z- test analysis of economic viability as a determinant of widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State.

Income Source	N	X	Std Dev.	Df	z-cal	z-crit	alpha level	Result
No Source of Income	100	2.74	1.06				0.05	
				198	0.73	1.960		Not Significant
Have Source of Income	100	2.81	1.06					

From the z-test analysis of economic viability as a determinant of widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State, it was seen that the z-cal which is 0.73 is less than the z-crit of 1.960. By this therefore, it means that the null hypothesis that economic viability as a determinant of widow maltreatment among widows is accepted and the alternate rejected. Therefore, economic viability of the widow does not significantly determine widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State.

Summary of the Findings

The study sought to explore some psycho-demographic factors that determine widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State. Three research questions which transformed to the hypotheses, guided the study. The study tried to verify the extent to which wife's age, length of marriage and economic viability of the widow determine widow maltreatment among widows in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State. It was found out from the study that widows pass through some traumatic experiences following the death of their husbands. However, statistical analyses revealed that wife's age, length of marriage and economic viability of the widow do not significantly determine widow maltreatment among widows in the area.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Widows who are still young and marriageable after the death of their husbands, should be encouraged to remarry if they so wish, as this may reduce the level of pain and harassment from people.
2. Harmful widowhood practices should be abolished as by the Governments as this will reduce some of the adverse effects of such practices on widows.
3. Widows should be encouraged to get skills, especially the unemployed ones. This will empower them and also provide economic support for them and their children.
4. Punitive measures should be spelt out for any society perpetrating dangerous and unhealthy widowhood practices in Igbo land in particular and the nation in general.

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