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PERCEPTIONS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS ABOUT WIDOWHOOD PRACTICES IN OHAFIA EDUCATION ZONE; COUNSELING IMPLICATIONS

Oyeoku, E. K., *Anyanwu, J. I., Ezegbe, B. N. and Abiogu G. C.

Department of Educational Foundations, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to investigate perceptions of secondary school social studies teachers about widowhood practices in Ohafia education zone in Abia State. Four research questions and two null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was 520 Social Studies teachers from which a sample of 95 male and 135 female social studies teachers from secondary schools in Ohafia education zone were randomly selected. The instrument used to collect data for the study was questionnaire titled: Perceptions of Secondary School Social Studies Teachers on Widowhood Practices Questionnaire (PSSSSTWPQ) which was validated by experts. The data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation and t-test. The major findings of the study are: widows are subjected to staying indoors throughout the period of mourning, shaving of head, pubic areas and eye brows as well as wearing black or white mourning clothes. The problems associated with widowhood include denying widows access to their deceased husband's landed property, houses and farmlands. Besides, they have the sole responsibility of taking care of their children's feeding and sponsoring their children's education. In some cases, widows are sent out of the family for having no male children among others. Based on the following findings of the study, recommendations were made among which are: There is need for immediate action by the Abia state government to protect widows and ensure that their conditions are not made worse by traditions through enactment of law and enlightenment campaign on widowhood practices for women. Girl-child education should be encouraged in order to empower women with entrepreneurial skills and be gainfully employed to cope with the challenges of widowhood when they find themselves in such a situation.

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INTRODUCTION

A widow is a woman whose spouse has died and has not remarried while widowhood occurs when either a husband or a wife experiences the loss of a spouse. The consequences of loss of spouse differ prominently in Nigeria due to culture and tradition. For instance, Azikiwe (1994) observed that a wife mourns her husband for a period of six months to one year wearing the white or black mourning dress whereas the same does not apply to a husband who loses his wife. The author further stressed that some widowers remarry few months after the death of their wives while such on the part of the widow is an abomination. More often than not according to Izuako (2003), a widow is accused of being responsible for the death

of her husband, especially when the man dies at a young age. Therefore, widows are coerced into going through degrading and dehumanizing rituals otherwise referred to as widowhood practices all in an effort to prove her innocence. Some of the practices according to Akpochofa (2009) are harmful, painful and resentful; they are oppressive, vary from culture to culture and cover a wide range of rites. These harmful traditional widowhood rites are informed by the concept of and negative attitude to women embedded in the legal, religious, economic, social and political structure of our male-dominated and patriarchal world (UNICEF Nigeria, 1998). The authors further enumerated some of the harmful traditional widowhood rites as:

Seclusion; the widow is kept in seclusion for a period ranging from eight days to three months during which she suffers complete alienation with psychological and mental torture.

***Corresponding author: Anyanwu, J. I.,**
Department of Educational Foundations, University of Nigeria,
Nsukka

Dethronement; the widow is forced to sit on the floor, defacement; the widow's hair is cleanly shaven (head, eyebrows, pubic area). In addition, she is not allowed to take her bath, forced to wear just one mourning dress and subjected to routinised crying, for a whole year.

Purification; she is regarded as being culturally contaminated and therefore needs cleansing which translates to expensive and dehumanizing purification rites and rituals to save other members of the family.

Disinheritance; in most societies in Nigeria, widows have no inheritance rights to their deceased husband's property. The dead husband's relations usually confiscate his possessions leaving the widow and her children nothing to subsist on. Her only claim is through her male issues. Regrettably, there are cases where she is dispossessed by her own sons.

Levitation; widows are treated like mere chattels inheritable alongside the dead husband's material possessions by the deceased brothers or male members of the extended family.

Suspicion; women often become murder suspects as soon as their husbands die. Dead husband relations sometimes force the widow to drink water used in cleaning the corpse as a proof of innocence or confirmation of guilt, thereby exposing the helpless woman to transmissible diseases like cholera. The widow in some places is forced to lay head to foot with her husband's corpse to mark severance of sexual relations. Still in some other places, the widow is forbidden from seeing the husband's corpse and this has been discovered to traumatize such women years after. Izuako (2003) stated that the widow is mandated to perform 'Aja ani' which stipulates that the widow has to sleep with the high priest to cleanse her of her dead husband's spirit. She is equally forced into remarriage to the husband's relative.

In Imo state, Nigeria, particularly in Owerri and environs, Akpan (2000) observed that a widow mourns her husband's death for one year and during this period, she wears black dresses. She is not allowed to step out of the house for the first 40 days or to cook or touch food meant for other members of the family. The widow is seen as unclean until she has completed the prescribed traditional rites. Survey carried out in Imo state by Nzewi (1989) revealed that widows' ordeal begins immediately after the announcement of their husbands' demise. The relatives demanded documents pertaining to their husbands' property including land, investment and bank accounts. The widows reported that they were required to take oaths as proof that knowledge of relevant land and personal property was not concealed. In addition to these rites, the family of the deceased may alleviate or reduce the widow's grief by the support or harassment they give the widow. There are many instances where widows have been deprived of the husbands' resources and therefore have to start life all over again; such widows are left to struggle and cater for themselves and their children (Saba, 1997).

Widowhood affects the children of the widow in quite a number of ways. The decline in family income implies that they have less of what they used to have. Also, there is the lack of masculine influence which can have adverse effects on children's disciplines and morality. Furthermore, the child's

social environment is less enriched because of the absence of a father. These could lead to lower self-esteem, economic insecurity and feelings of inadequacy in males and females. The males may develop weaker morality and superego because of the absence of male role models (Biller, (1974). The girls, on the other hand, may become shy and uncertain about their activities around men (Hetherington, 1972).

From literature, harmful and dehumanizing widowhood rites are being practiced in various cultures in Nigeria especially on women at the death of their husbands. While some see it as normal, others like Azikiwe (1994) and Izuoke (2003) argues strongly that these ritualistic practices are fundamental violations of women's human rights, and no longer relevant. The problem of this study put in question form is: What are the perceptions of Social Studies Teachers about Widowhood practices in Ohafia Education Zone? The involvement of social studies teachers in the study of widowhood practices in Ohafia Education zone stems from the fact that social studies teachers keep pace with the dynamism of the community, significant in social studies teaching and should also be in constant tune with the social circumstances and development in the community. Consequently, the opinion of the social studies teachers were elicited across gender. Gender is one of the important variables considered relevant in this study because of the way male and female perceive ideas, though subjected to cultural differences. This means that gender is nurtured and therefore, subjected to cultural influences and interpretation as well as limitations (Eze, 2013:7). This study will be significant to Abia State government and the community in general. To the government, the findings of the study will help them enhance their policy decisions on enacting laws in favour of widows, thereby protecting human rights. To the community, the findings will help them through campaign, workshops and seminars acquire knowledge and skills that will help them to be self sufficient to an extent.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the perceptions of social studies teachers in Ohafia education zone about widowhood practices and counseling implications.

Research Questions

The following research questions were asked to guide the study:

- What type of rites are widows subjected to in Ohafia Education Zone?
- What are the problems associated with widowhood?
- What coping strategies are adopted by widows to cope with their problems?
- What are the suggested strategies for eliminating widowhood harmful traditional practices?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Descriptive Survey research design was employed. The area of study is Ohafia education Zone of Abia State. The population of the study comprised all the secondary school Social Studies teachers in Ohafia Education Zone of Abia State. Based on the 2011/2012 academic year, this population

was 520. Social Studies teachers are considered relevant for this studies because community dynamism reflects in social studies teaching and learning. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select 95 male and 135 female teachers from secondary schools in the education zone. The stratification of the sample was done using the variable of sex (Male and Female). The instrument used for data collection was questionnaire titled Perception of Secondary School Social Studies Teachers on Widowhood Practices Questionnaire (PSSSTWPQ). The questionnaire was developed by the researchers on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (4 points) Agree (3 points), Disagree 2 points and Strongly Disagree (1 point). The respondents were to make their responses based on these scales. It comprised two sections. Section A sought demographic information from the respondents on name of school, sex and whether married or a widow. Section B comprised 27 statements covering types of rites widows are subjected to, problems associated with widowhood, coping strategies adopted by widows to cope with their problems and suggested strategies for eliminating widowhood harmful practices. It was validated by four experts; three in Sociology of Education and one in Measurement and evaluation of the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. A pilot study carried out to determine the reliability of the instrument showed that the instrument has a reliability coefficient of 0.71 which indicated that the instrument was reliable.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

Five research assistants who were Sandwich students of the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka who were teaching in various secondary schools were involved in administering and retrieving the instrument from the respondents. In analyzing the data collected, the researchers used means and standard deviations to answer the four research questions. A mean of 2.50 was adopted as the cut-off point (acceptance level) for the research questions. The t-test statistic was used to test the two hypothesis formulated for the study.

RESULTS

Table 1 above presents the mean ratings of Social Studies male and female teachers in Ohafia education Zone on the types of rites widows are subjected to. Looking at the table, we can see that three of the items; specifically items 1, 2, and 3 are highly rated by the both male and female teachers. Items 1, 2 and 3 are rated 3.12, 2.55 and 2.69 with standard deviations of 0.54, 0.65 and 0.61 respectively by the social studies male teachers whereas their female counterparts rated the same items 3.20, 2.59 and 2.79 respectively.

It is therefore the opinions of the social studies male and female teachers that the type of rites widows are subjected to include staying indoors throughout the period of mourning, shaving of head, pubic areas and eye brows as well as wearing black or white mourning clothes. Table 2 presents the mean ratings of the teachers on the problems associated with widowhood. It is observed from the table, we can see that seven of the eight items are highly rated by both the male and female social studies teachers.

Items 7 to 13 are rated 3.45, 3.20, 3.20, 2.84, 2.60, 2.84 and 2.60 with standard deviations of 0.53, 0.65, 0.65, 0.68, 0.79, 0.68 and 0.79 by the social studies male teachers while their female counterparts rated them 3.43, 3.12, 3.24, 2.88, 2.80, 2.80 and 2.76 with standard deviations of 0.60, 0.58, 0.60, 0.78, 0.73, 0.73 and 0.75 respectively. It is thus their opinions that the problems associated with widowhood include leaving widows alone to take care of their children's feeding and with the responsibility of sponsoring their children's education, denying widows access to their deceased husband's houses, disallowing widows into late husband's farmlands, stripping widows of landed property of the deceased husbands and sending widows out of the family for having no male children. Table 3 presents the mean ratings of the social studies male and female teachers on the coping strategies adopted by widows to cope with their problem. From the data presented all the six items are highly rated by the two categories of respondents. These items (items 15 – 20) are rated 2.69, 3.32, 2.96, 2.96, 2.98 and 2.86 with standard deviations of 0.61, 0.74, 0.86, 0.61, 0.99 and 0.89 respectively by the social studies male teachers while their female counterparts rated these same items 2.76, 3.24, 2.88, 2.79, 3.12 and 2.80 with standard deviations of 0.75, 0.60, 0.78, 0.72, 0.58 and 0.73 respectively.

It is thus the opinions of the two categories of respondents that the coping strategies adopted by widows to cope with their problems include going to court to seek redress, and to relations, depending on their grown up children, consulting their churches, starting life afresh and consulting town unions. Table 4 above presents the mean reports of social studies male and female teachers on the strategies for eliminating widowhood harmful practices in Ohafia education zone. Data on Table 3, shows that all the seven items are highly rated by the two categories of respondents. Items 21 to 27 are rated 3.60, 3.64, 3.54, 3.34, 3.40, 3.20 and 3.30 with standard deviations of 0.50, 0.45, 0.64, 0.81, 0.76, 0.88 and 0.61 by the social studies male teachers while their female counterparts rated these items 3.43, 3.74, 3.43, 3.20, 3.20, 3.12 and 3.20 with standard deviations of 0.61, 0.56, 0.61, 0.68, 0.68, 0.60 and 0.68 respectively. It is therefore the opinions of the social studies male and female teachers that the strategies for eliminating widowhood harmful practices include the making

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of the Social Studies teachers on types of Rites widows in Ohafia education zone are subjected to

S/N	Type of Rites	Social Studies Male Teachers			Social Studies Female Teachers		
		X	SD	Dec	X	SD	Dec
1	Staying indoors throughout the period of mourning	3.12	0.54	A	3.20	0.68	A
2.	Shaving of head, pubic areas and eye brows	2.55	0.65	A	2.59	0.60	A
3.	Wearing black or white mourning clothes	2.69	0.61	A	2.79	0.72	A
4.	Oath taking to prove that she is not responsible for the death of her husband	2.10	0.90	D	1.89	1.06	D
5.	Forced to marry the late husband's brother	1.70	1.10	D	1.80	1.13	D
6.	Performing sacrifices to sever link with the dead husband	1.86	1.02	D	1.78	1.19	D

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of the Social Studies Teachers on problems associated with Widowhood in Ohafia education zone

S/N	Problems associated with widowhood	Social Studies male Teachers			Female Social Studies Teachers		
		X	SD	Dec	X	SD	Dec
7.	Widows are left alone to take care of children's feeding	3.45	0.55	A	3.43	0.60	A
8.	Widows are left with responsibility of sponsoring children's education	3.20	0.65	A	3.12	0.58	A
9.	Widow are denied access to most of the rooms in her husbands' houses	3.20	0.65	A	3.24	0.60	A
10.	Widows are denied access to deceased husbands' houses	2.84	0.68	A	2.88	0.78	A
11.	Widows are not allowed into late husbands' farmland	2.60	0.79	A	2.80	0.73	A
12.	Widows are stripped of landed property of the deceased husband	2.84	0.68	A	2.80	0.73	A
13.	Widows are sent out of the family for having no male child	2.60	0.79	A	2.76	0.75	A
14.	Widows are not allowed to operate late husband's bank account	2.46	0.90	A	2.46	0.92	A

Table 3. Mean Rating of the Male and Female Social Studies Teachers on the Coping Strategies for adopted by widows to cope with their problems

S/N	Coping strategies adopted by widows	Social Studies Male Teachers			Social Studies Female Teachers		
		X	SD	Dec	X	SD	Dec
15.	Going to court to seek redress	2.69	0.61	A	2.76	0.75	A
16.	Going to relatives	3.32	0.74	A	3.24	0.60	A
17.	Depending on their grown-up children	2.96	0.86	A	2.88	0.78	A
18.	Consulting their churches	2.69	0.61	A	2.79	0.72	A
19.	Starting life afresh	2.98	0.99	A	3.12	0.58	A
20.	Consulting their Town Unions	2.86	0.89	A	2.80	0.73	A

Table 4. Mean Ratings of Social Studies Teachers on Strategies for Eliminating Widowhood Harmful Practices in Ohafia education zone

S/N	Suggested Strategies for Eliminating Widowhood Harmful Traditional Practices	Social Studies Male Teachers			Social Studies Female Teachers		
		X	SD	Dec	X	SD	Dec
21.	Government should make laws concerning rights of widows	3.60	0.50	A	3.43	0.61	A
22.	Encourage girls to receive formal education which empowers them	3.64	0.45	A	3.74	0.56	A
23.	Widows should be catered for by the social welfare department of the state	3.54	0.64	A	3.43	0.61	A
24.	Mass campaign against disinheritance	3.34	0.81	A	3.20	0.68	A
25.	Will writing should be encouraged	3.40	0.76	A	3.20	0.68	A
26.	Family members should be sensitized to realize that the property of the deceased was acquired through collective efforts of husband and wife	3.20	0.88	A	3.12	0.60	A
27.	Organizing seminars and workshops on some of the social problems experienced by widows	3.30	0.61	A	3.20	0.68	A

Table 5. t-test Analysis of the differences between the Mean opinion Scores of the Male and Female Secondary School Social Studies Teachers on Coping Strategies adopted by Widows

S/N	Coping Strategies adopted by Widows	Respondents	N	X	SD	t cal	t table	Decision
15.	Going to court to seek redress	Social studies male teachers	95	2.69	0.61	-0.7	1.96	Accept
		Social studies female teachers	135	2.76	0.75			
16.	Going to relatives	Social studies male teachers	95	3.32	0.74	1.05	1.96	Accept
		Social studies female teachers	135	3.24	0.60			
17.	Depending on their grown-up children	Social studies male teachers	95	2.96	0.86	0.73	1.96	Accept
		Social studies female teachers	135	2.88	0.78			
18.	Consulting their churches	Social studies male teachers	95	2.69	0.61	-1.14	1.96	Accept
		Social studies female teachers	135	2.79	0.72			
19.	Starting life afresh	Social studies male teachers	95	2.98	0.99	-1.27	1.96	Accept
		Social studies female teachers	135	3.12	0.58			
20.	Going to Town Unions	Social studies male teachers	95	2.86	0.89	0.55	1.96	Accept
		Social studies female teachers	135	2.80	0.73			

Table 6. t-test analysis of the difference between the mean opinion scores of Male and Female Secondary School Social Studies Teachers on Strategies for eliminating Widowhood harmful practices

S/N	Suggested Strategies for Eliminating Widowhood harmful practices	Respondents	N	X	SD	t cal value	Table value of t	Decision
21.	Government should make laws concerning the rights of widows	Social studies male teachers	95	3.60	0.50	2.43	1.96	Fail to Accept
		Social studies female teachers	135	3.43	0.61			
22.	Encourage girls to receive formal education which empowers them	Social studies male teachers	95	3.64	0.45	-0.67	1.96	Accept
		Social studies female teachers	135	3.74	0.56			
23.	Widows should be catered for by the social welfare department	Social studies male teachers	95	3.54	0.64	1.41	1.96	Accept
		Social studies female teachers	135	3.43	0.61			
24.	Mass campaign against disinheritance	Social studies male teachers	95	3.34	0.81	1.40	1.96	Accept
		Social studies female teachers	135	3.20	0.68			
25.	Will writing should be encouraged	Social studies male teachers	95	3.40	0.76	2.06	1.96	Fail to Accept
		Social studies female teachers	135	3.20	0.68			
26.	Family members should be sensitized to realize that the so-called property of the deceased was acquired through collective efforts of husband and wife.	Social studies male teachers	95	3.20	0.88	0.28		Accept
		Social studies female teachers	135	3.12	0.60			
	Organizing seminars and workshops on some of the social problems experienced by widows	Social studies male teachers	95	3.30	0.61	1.11	1.96	Accept
		Social studies female teachers	135	3.20	0.68			

of laws by government concerning the rights of widows, encouraging girls to receive formal education which empowers them, catering for widows by the social welfare department, organizing mass campaign against disinheritance, encouraging will writing, sensitizing family members about the property of the deceased, and organizing seminars, workshops on some of the social problems experienced by widows. Data displayed on Table 5 shows that the calculated t-values of the items at 0.05 level of significance were all below the table (critical) value of 1.96. These items, namely items 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 have t-test values of -0.7, 1.05, 0.73, -1.14, -1.27 and 0.55. Therefore there was no significant difference between the mean opinion scores of social studies male and female teachers on the coping strategies adopted by widows in Ohafia education zone. Data displayed on Table 6 shows that the calculated t-values of five of the items were less than the critical (Table) value of 1.96. These are items 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, and 27 with calculated t-values of -0.67, 1.47, 1.40, 0.28 and 1.11. So there were no significant differences between the mean opinion scores of social studies male and female teachers on the suggested strategies for eliminating widowhood harmful practices in Ohafia education zone. However, two other items namely items 21 and 25 have t-calculated values above the critical value of 1.96. So there were significant differences between the mean opinion scores of social studies male and female teachers on these items.

DISCUSSION

Male and female social studies teachers (Table 1) reported that widows are subjected to staying indoors throughout the period of mourning, shaving of head, pubic hairs and eye brows, performing sacrifices to sever the link with the dead as well as wearing black or mourning clothes. This finding agrees with that of Azikiwe (1994) who undertook a case study of widowhood practices in Afikpo education zone of Ebonyi State using a sample of 210 widows. Azikiwe found out that the widows are subjected to performing sacrifices to sever link with the dead, staying indoors throughout the period of mourning, shaving of head, pubic hairs and eye brows and oath taking to prove that the widow is not responsible for the husband's death. The similarity of this finding with Azikiwe's goes to prove that widows are subjected to dehumanizing rites in many parts of Nigeria. Male and female social studies teachers agreed that the problems associated with widowhood include abandoning widows to take care of their children's feeding and sponsoring their children's education, despite the fact that they deny widows access to their deceased husband's houses, landed property and farmlands. The above finding is also in line with the assertions of Ahonsi (1997) who stated that widows across Nigeria usually encounter problems such as responsibility to take care of their children's education, denying them access to their deceased husband's house – farmlands and sending them out of the family for having no male children.

Both the male and female (Table 3) social studies teachers reported that the coping strategies adopted by widows to cope with their problems include going to court to seek redress, going to relatives, depending on their grown-up children, consulting their Churches, starting life afresh and consulting town unions. Oloko (1997) had reported that widows usually depend on their grown up children as a coping strategy. Some of the widows, according to Oloko do consult their churches

during religious programmes for help while some go to relatives. It was also found out that the strategies for eliminating widowhood harmful practices (Table 4) include making laws by government concerning the rights of widows encouraging girls to receive formal education which empowers them, catering for the widows by the social welfare department and organizing seminars and workshops on some of the problems experienced by widows. This finding is in line with that of Azikiwe (1994), Oloko (1997) and Ahonsi (1997) who in their separate submissions had called on government to make laws concerning the rights of widows. Ahonsi (1997) had on his own part suggested that the social welfare departments should cater for the right of widows.

Counseling Implications and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, there is need for counselors to take immediate action to ameliorate the emotional trauma faced by the widows and reduce the incidence of the widowhood practices. This can be achieved by the Counselors through organizing group counseling activities for fellow teachers who are widows where widows meet with others, share their views and relate with one another. This helps them come to the realization that their case is not peculiar. Besides, it constitutes a source of social support for the widows. School counselors should use the Parents Forum in their various schools to educate parents on the dangers of widowhood practices and the importance of Girl-child education to empower women with entrepreneurial skills and be gainfully employed to cope with the challenges of widowhood when they find themselves in such a situation. With the advent of information communication technology especially the radio and television, counselors should organize talks on widowhood, give occupational information to them that hinges on entrepreneurship and sources of income for wealth generation. Abia State government should protect widows and ensure that their conditions are not made worse by tradition through enactment of laws and sponsor enlightenment campaigns on widowhood practices for women, especially the illiterate ones by counselors in various schools and social welfare workers.

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