

Revisiting Funerary Culture and Obnoxious Widowhood Practices against Nigerian Womenfolk: Advocating for Cultural Reform

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Abstract

Many cultures in Africa are characterized by various forms of prejudice and violence against women. In Nigeria, traditional harmful practices and violence against women and girls have increasingly attracted attention. These practices include female genital mutilation, child marriage, forced marriage, harmful widowhood rites, denial of access to tertiary education, high bride prices, denial of inheritance, child labour, and patriarchal dominance. Although such practices vary across cultures, this study focuses specifically on harmful widowhood practices against Nigerian women. Widowhood practices refer to rites performed for women following the death of their husbands, as prescribed by different Nigerian cultures. Such practices constitute persistent forms of prejudice that undermine women's dignity and rights. Existing literature indicates that harmful widowhood practices have devastating physical, psychological, economic, and intellectual consequences for women. They reinforce the inferior status of women and contribute to the continued violation of their rights, thereby undermining gender equality and national economic development. This study investigates harmful traditional practices against Nigerian widows and examines their implications for the overall development of the nation. It also considers the extent of the damage caused and possible ways forward. Particular attention is given to the role of education in addressing harmful traditional practices against Nigerian women and girls. The study concludes that the neglect of women in the name of cultural glorification should be condemned. Girl-child education is identified as a strategic tool for promoting economic development through trained teachers. Furthermore, the growing reach of the Internet, mobile technologies, and social media offers opportunities to address harmful practices through awareness and advocacy. The study concludes with practical recommendations.

Key Words: *Traditional Harmful Practices, Education, Nigerian Women, Widowhood, National Development*

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Introduction

Marriage is a good thing and a blessing from God. He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord (Proverb 18:22). Marriage is good but has its own challenges, which include childlessness and losing one's spouse, among others. In Nigeria, women who lost their husbands suffer more devastating experiences than men who lost their wives. Women are made to face dehumanizing treatments from in-laws who sometimes claim that she was responsible for the death of her husband. Debates on how to reconcile the conflict between human rights and harmful cultural practices have been evolving around the world for the last two decades. In the face of the massive support for numerous international human rights instruments that seek to combat all forms of discrimination and harmful traditional practices against women, practices such as widowhood rites are still persisting (Afolayan, cited in Egbule, 2019). Across African societies, women continue to struggle for gender equality and women's rights issues. Unfortunately, not much attention is devoted to widowhood rites in Nigeria. Particularly, the way in which widowhood rites undermine the rights of women in south-eastern Nigeria, where this research focuses, requires immediate intervention.

Funerary customs are deeply rooted in every culture, reflecting a society's values, beliefs, and traditions. In Nigeria, these practices play a significant role in shaping the lives of the surviving family members, particularly widows. However, it is imperative to recognize that some aspects of these customs may inadvertently perpetuate gender-based discrimination and infringe upon the rights of women. A woman is referred to as a widow when her husband passes away. After her spouse's death, the widow is subjected to a set of customs known as widowhood rites that are typically imposed by the societal belief system. Widowhood rites are those that are expected of widows to carry out after their husbands pass away. Widowhood customs are those that society expects of widows when their husbands pass away. Most Nigerian society perceives widows as prime suspects in the deaths of their husbands.

In most parts of South Eastern and South Southern Nigeria, widows are treated like sub-humans and as murder suspects. On the contrary, widowers across Nigeria rarely go through these ordeals at the demise of their wives. From my observations, they are not subjected to indignities when their wives die; they are not compelled to mourn, nor are they subjected to any of the dehumanizing experiences that widows go through. During the mourning period, the widower sleeps wherever he wants, though he may be confined to a particular place. They are allowed free movement within the house and are not restricted from visiting certain places (Awoh, cited in Ifeanchio, 2023).

Concepts Clarification

Some concepts are pivotal in this article. Hence, to make this article more comprehensive and comprehensible, some basic concepts are briefly clarified:

Widow/Widowhood

A widow is a woman who has lost her husband through death. In other words, a woman whose husband died and does not remarry is a widow, while a man whose wife is dead and does not remarry is a widower. The term widowhood refers to the state or period of being a widow. Widowhood is concerned with a mourning period, which commences at the death of a partner and lasts for an unspecified period (Oliobi et al., 2001).

Widowhood Rites

In this period, the bereaved mourn their loss, and in many places, they are expected to undergo a series of rituals referred to as widowhood rites or rituals. Widowhood rites, as practiced in many traditional African societies, are the practices that accompany the mourning of the loss of one's spouse. Widowhood rites are culturally defined as ceremonies that a spouse undertakes in honor

of his deceased partner (Atindanbila et al., cited in Ifeanacho, 2023). For George et al. (2016), widowhood rites are socio-cultural rituals that a woman undergoes to show respect and mourn her deceased husband. Manala (2015) notes that widowhood rites serve as a transitional period that prepares a woman for the transition from marital status to being a widow.

Culture

From a layman's perspective, culture could be described as the way of life of a particular group of people that guides their daily activities within their local milieu. According to Ahonsi (1997), culture and customs refer to the totality of the way of life in a society as shaped by the material conditions therein, history, systems of beliefs, political organization, and legitimation. It is a lifestyle that comes from accumulated knowledge and experiences, given the peculiar environment in which people find themselves. It controls their ideas and philosophy of life (Egbule, Ukor, & Olori, 2023). According to Oreh (2006), the major function of culture is that it prescribes the ways members of a society should behave, and those who control the means by which these ways are acquired over time succeed in transferring their ways of life to the majority, who then depend on them.

The Igbo People: An Overview

The Igbo people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria. According to Okafor and Emeka (2004), the Igbo homeland is the forest of southern Nigeria without cropping to the west and lying between longitude 60 and 80 East and latitude 50 and 70 North. Nigeria has 36 states, and out of these 36 states, the Igbo people live in Ebonyi, Enugu, Abia, Anambra, and Imo states. Other Igbo-speaking Nigerians are found in some of the parts of Delta State, River State, Cross River, and Benue States, but this project is more concerned with the core Igbos of the South Eastern States. Agwu, cited in Oreh (2006), stated that the Igbos are mostly craftsmen, farmers, and traders. The most recent estimate of the Igbos from the CIA (2023) World Factbook entry for Nigeria revealed that the Igbos are about 23.5% of the Nigerian population of 230,842,743 (2023 est.). The boundaries of these states are fixed sometimes for geographical and sometimes for political and cultural reasons (Okafor & Emeke, 2004). The Igbo people have a unique cultural trait that gives meaning to their lives and work and forms the core of their existence. The Igbo people believe so much in reincarnation, life after, and their ancestors. Central to traditional religious thought is the concept of continuing to play an active part in the lives of their ancestors (Ohale, 2003).

Many historians, sociologists, archaeologists, anthropologists, and philosophers have expressed different views about the origin of the Igbos. Some have linked the Igbos to the Jewish race; others simply see them as the Jews of Africa, while others believe that they just originated from Nigeria. Their origin notwithstanding, the Nigeria we know today cannot be complete without the Igbos. Most recently, the traditional belief system and the cultural norms and values of the Igbo people have been reduced due to some social changes in our society today. Such social changes include education and religion, among others. It is worthy to note that most Igbo people have converted to Christianity, and Christian teaching adheres strictly to the belief that death is the end of the life of a man; the body dies and the spirit ascends to God, the creator. The Igbo traditional society is governed by customs and cultural norms, together with the formal and informal sanctions for enforcing them; these constitute the system by standard of their communities, and so they conform to the prescribed norms, and any deviation from the norms invites punishment. However, Igbo tradition and custom are derived from their cosmology, and this has a greater influence on their human practice and fosters the social injustices that women, particularly widows, endure (Ohale, 2012).

The Igbo prize their womenfolk, yet a woman in Igbo culture is not accorded full social recognition no matter her status in life unless she is married and bears children or at least a child. Igbo women remain women of substance as long as their husbands are alive. If an Igbo woman loses her husband to death, her story changes. Automatically, she becomes a murder suspect in some places because death in most parts of Igbo land is never deemed a natural occurrence. The widow is seen as unclean and unholy, and as a result of people's perception of the widow, certain harmful widowhood practices are meted out to her. These practices arise from the culture of the particular Igbo community (Oreh, 2006).

Widowhood Practices and the Associated Rituals in Igbo Tradition

Like many other traditional behaviors in modern Nigerian society, widowhood rituals have persisted in silence or in the open despite numerous changes. The death of a male family member presents an opportunity for the other males in the extended family to enhance their holdings of the in-demand and inelastic commodity "land" in Nigerian society, as in many other African societies.

In Nigeria, practically all ethnic groups practice widowhood, especially the three largest ethnic groups: Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa. The tradition of widowhood is carried down from generation to generation and is as old as civilization or the human race itself. The custom of widowhood is typically harsh for women. Because of the patriarchal nature of Igbo society, the widowhood practice there is especially difficult for women. However, Adeyemo (2016) believes that because of some cultural disparities in widows' widowhood practices, the topic of widowhood, particularly in Nigeria, appears to have gender implications. He also emphasized that traditions are particularly hard on widows because widowhood involves varying degrees of physical hardship, deprivation, ritual contamination, emotional instability, socio-economic trauma, and psychological trauma.

However, Ohale (2012) noted that the five core Igbo states of Nigeria present widowhood practices that individually vary in their approach but collectively highlight the social injustices meted out to widows. She further stated that all the different groups that make up the Igbo tribe appear united in their marginalization of the widow, some more than others, and so the responsibility of a cultural change should rest squarely on the shoulders of every Igbo (Ohale 2012). In Igbo culture, a woman becomes a widow when her husband dies. As a result, she is addressed as 'Nwanyi Isi Mkpe' meaning a woman without a head, her deceased husband being her head. In this culture, no one seems to die a natural death; the widow is often accused, usually by her deceased husband's relatives, of killing her husband.

Nwanegbo, cited in Akinbi (2015), makes us understand that, in some parts of Igbo land, when a man dies, the wife will tie a wrapper over her chest without a blouse. She must not talk to anybody and will not have her bath until her husband is buried. After the burial, the 'Umuada' (daughters of the man's ancestors) will come to shave her hair and bathe her in an open compound, only having the privacy of being surrounded by the 'Umuada'. Apparently oblivious to the tragic loss that every widow suffers from the deaths of their husbands, callous in-laws conspire to apply vicious burial rites to dehumanize the embattled widow. They confront her with questions on how and when the deceased husband died, the circumstances that led to his death, what she did to save him from dying, and her extent of contact with the late husband's family before his death. Where the explanations are not satisfactory, the widow must drink the water used in bathing the corpse of her husband to prove her innocence. In fact, there is no end to the humiliating punishment encountered by widows under the cover of native laws and customs.

Boaheng (2014) maintained that these rites sometimes lead to infringements on human rights. Yet widows are compelled to religiously observe the rites, or else they incur the wrath of their ancestors. According to the report of the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (2001), it is evident that across a wide range of African cultures, widows are subject to patriarchal customary and religious laws and confront discrimination in inheritance rights. Many of these

widows suffer abuse and exploitation at the hands of family members, often in the context of property disputes.

The phase of grieving is accompanied by a number of life events, many of which have broad repercussions. Several of these traditions have been labeled as barbarous, horrible, outdated, and unethical. In Nigeria, funeral rites are many and have a wide range of cultural importance. The state of widowhood is typically accompanied by evident challenges, including forced marriage, deprivation of inheritance, oppression through widowhood rituals, and a host of others. These widowhood practices include:

Deprivation of Inheritance

Many widows became victims of their husbands' male relatives, who, rather than protect and support them, denied them any access to their husbands' land or property (United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, 2001). The widow might be forced out of her husband's home after his passing if she doesn't have any male adult children because his oldest brother will have inherited both the home and the land. Most of the time, the widow's husband's family does not financially assist her, especially if she refuses to accept the position of an additional wife to one of her husband's siblings.

Confinement

Generally, in Nigeria, widowhood practices are observed by almost all ethnic groups (the major ethnic groups in Nigeria are Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa). However, there are a variety of forms of such traditional practices across ethnic groups (Olakitike, 2009). In one community in South-South Nigeria (Delta State), "after an initial seven-day confinement, a subsequent thirty-day confinement for mourning in a tiny outdoor hut is mandatory for widows (Ewelukwa, cited in Afolayan, 2011). At this point, she must refrain from bathing, she must sit on the ground, her food must be prepared separately, and she is fed by another widow from a broken plate that will be thrown away after the seclusion period.

Social Isolation

Seclusion and general isolation of the widows for a certain period from the community is a widespread practice in Africa. In most parts of Igbo society, the early parts of this period are usually rigorous. During the first 28 days, the widow is not allowed to go anywhere; certain rituals must be performed at the expiration of the 28 days before the widow can perform normal activities. She will hold a kitchen knife or broom stick because she is not allowed to touch any part of her body with her hands but must use this knife or broom stick. According to Iloka (2022), social isolation is very obvious during the mourning period of one year and after the widowhood rite.

Forced Marriage

In some communities in Nigeria, widows may be forced into new conjugal relations with a male relative or be forbidden to remarry, even if they wish to do so. As a result, many women may spend a long period of their lives in widowhood, with all its associated disadvantages and stigmas (United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, 2001). Some funeral rites demanded of widows at the death of their spouses are sadistic and barbaric. These atrocious social injustices meted out to widows are summarized below:

- Eating only food cooked at home
- Refrain from bathing for a number of days.
- Seeing the late husband's corpse
- Shaving of hairs on the head or any part of the
- Crying at odd times to prove innocence
- To sit on the floor during any period of the late husband's burial
- To drink the water used in washing the corpse of the
- To weep and wail loudly at intervals

- Throwing a woman out of a matrimonial home or denying her inheritance
- Forcing her to wear particular clothes—black or white clothes, among many others.

Factors Responsible for the Prevalence of Obnoxious Widowhood Practices in Nigeria

There are notable factors responsible for the prevalence of unhealthy widowhood practices in every part of the country. The notable factors include illiteracy, gender inequality, ignorance of the law, superstitious beliefs, the failure of men to write a will, and the poor socio-economic status of women.

Failure of Men to Write a Will

The majority of husbands don't bother to make a will before passing away, and when a wife even makes a suggestion, this may cause a village or family council meeting on the grounds that she is plotting to assassinate the husband in order to acquire his property. Due to the in-laws' desire to seize their brother's property, display animosity against the wife, and evict her from the family home, the wife will be in a disadvantageous position if there is no written will on the inheritance of properties (Akinbi, 2015).

Ignorance of the Law

Due to ignorance of the provisions of the law on this, the victims were not able to fight for their rights in the courts. Hence, both the court and the legal practitioners should avail themselves of these laws and fight this societal evil if the opportunity comes. Interestingly, flowing from both international and national legislation, some states in the South East, like Enugu and Anambra states, have legislated against all these obnoxious widowhood rites, which also include trial by ordeal. For example, Anambra State Malpractices Against Widows and Widowers (Prohibition) Law 2005 provides that "the fundamental human rights as enshrined in the Constitutions are inalienable and accrue to every widow and widower". And so in the section that created the offenses under this law, subsection 1 proves that no person shall compel a widow or widower to do any of the things stipulated in paragraph (a-o), which include to drink the water used in washing the corpse of the spouse or to perform any type of ritual in order to establish innocence, causing the death of the late spouse (section 4(1)). (b) To sleep either alone on the same bed or to be locked in the same room with the corpse of the late spouse, or to remain in compulsory confinement after the death of the spouse for any given period, and so on. Section 5 provides for a fine of twenty thousand naira (N20, 000.00) or a jail term not exceeding six months imprisonment, or both such a fine and imprisonment. A fine of twenty thousand naira is definitely not commensurate with the plight of widows. It is suggested that this law should have toed the line of the Criminal and Penal Codes (Iloka, 2022).

Superstitious Beliefs

In many African societies, including Nigeria, there is a widespread belief that without these rites and practices, the deceased person's spirit will not be at rest but will instead wander and, in some cases, cause harm to others in the community. So, in order to please the dead, the wife must go through all these widowhood rituals.

Poor Socio-Economic Status of Widows and Women

The unfortunate socioeconomic situation of widows and women in general is another significant influencing element responsible for the harmful widowhood practice in Nigeria. The Bible records that "a woman desired shall be to her husband, and he shall rule over her" (Gen. 3:16b). Therefore, the man is given ample opportunities to acquire leadership qualities, while the traditional role ascribed to women was to be housewives and general helpers to their husbands. All signs point to widowhood as a significant risk factor for falling into poverty. For instance, the enforcement of

stringent and protracted mourning traditions, such as seclusion, dress codes, and feasting, all have a significant impact on widows' socioeconomic standing. The customary obstacles to obtaining land, money, credit, a job, housing, and other sources of income also hindered widows from achieving economic security.

Illiteracy

Illiteracy is a major contributory factor to the pathetic and pitiable lot of widows in Nigeria. Illiteracy breeds superstition, fear of change, and incompetence in handling one's environment. The majority of widows in southwestern Nigeria adopt unhealthy widowhood habits due to their high rates of illiteracy. The formal education of girls has always lagged behind that of boys. In the past, men were thought to be intellectually superior to women. This is evident in the idea that investing in the education of a female child is foolish because "a woman's natural place is in the kitchen" (Adeyemo, 2016). The education of female children is neglected and severely discriminated against, which affects their development and exposes them to harmful cultural customs like the rigid observance of widowhood ceremonies. This has affected and is still affecting women to date. The illiteracy status of women has really contributed to the plight of widows. The illiterate widows are particularly disadvantaged, as illiteracy has rendered them socially and economically venerable. Olumukoro (2011) confirms that women's illiteracy perpetuates poor health, an inadequate diet, early entry into motherhood, frequent pregnancies, and a continued cycle of poverty.

The Challenge of Gender Inequality

Widowhood practices in Nigeria, particularly in eastern Nigeria, appear to have gender imbalances, as there are certain cultural practices that are applicable to widows and not widowers. Cultures and traditions are harder on widows because widowhood is faced with a certain degree of hardship, which comes in the form of deprivation, emotional instability, hardship, socioeconomic instability, and psychological trauma, among others (Agboola & Alahirah, 2020). Maleness is typically connected with superiority, which males assign to themselves as a result of natural selection and as a divine right (Okoye, 1995). Women have been viewed as having less sex since the beginning of time, when Adam, the first person, and Eve, who served as his companion, were fashioned from his ribs. Women are seen as second-class people and treated as such. For example, in the religious community, the males steadfastly adhere to the biblical specifics of the creation myth, which state that women were removed from the man's side, making the man appear to be the true creature. The divinity ascribed to the husband by culture influences the performance of rites and rituals such as impurity, defilement, cleansing, and purification, as well as a period of seclusion when the man dies (Okoye, 1995).

Implications of the Practices on Nigerian Widows

Widows are sometimes viewed with suspicion or even blamed for their husband's death. This can result in social isolation, making it challenging for widows to reintegrate into their communities. The widow had experienced a combination of psychological, mental, social, emotional, health, spiritual, and physical devastation. The psychological damage could be really severe. Compared to remarried widows and single women, widows have a tendency to have a greater risk of mental illness. In the majority of African settings, this may be due to the widow's own loss-related anguish as well as other humiliating cultural behaviors that are required as part of the widowhood ceremonies. The majority of widows also have deteriorating health, mostly as a result of the stress, loneliness, and financial difficulties they must endure to support themselves and their children. Some offensive cultural customs are also among the most unsanitary. For instance, the tradition that requires the widow to declare under oath that she is not to blame for her husband's death by drinking the water that was used to wash his body poses a serious health risk. The bereaved may end up with chronic illnesses that make them unable to cope as a result of this. Another health

risk is likely to impact the widow and result in a chronic or terminal illness. Additionally, widows have a greater death rate than their married counterparts (Iloka, 2022). Widowhood practices have destabilizing effects on widows, as could be seen below:

Economic and dehumanizing effects

The widows are poor and uncared for by people who are supposed to give them succor and help. Thus, many widows face extreme poverty, discrimination, and dehumanizing treatment. They were miserably deprived of their social security and family support. Their children too are isolated, often in unhealthy conditions, physically abused, and, at times, without inheriting any property (Akinbi, 2015).

Economic and Inheritance Challenges

Widows often face economic hardships, as they may be denied access to their deceased husband's property or resources. This can leave them vulnerable and financially dependent on extended family members, which may lead to further marginalization.

Psychological and health effects

These widowhood traditions also have the unpleasant side consequence of making many widows emotionally and psychologically unstable, prone to shock, and suffering from temporary or even permanent loss of memory and sensibility. They are susceptible to all diseases, especially after consuming the repulsive water used to bathe a corpse. Due to the stress they carry alone, many widows are diagnosed with higher levels of hypertension. The psychological toll of widowhood practices cannot be underestimated. The prolonged mourning periods and social isolation can lead to depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues among widows.

Emotional Challenges

The emotional symptoms manifested by a widow may include shock, sadness, sorrow, anxiety, denial, fear, loneliness, and sleep disturbance (insomnia).

Physical challenges

Widowhood practices cause physical trauma for widows. If the widows are denied autonomy and means to live productive and creative lives, they are also denied the opportunity for social and economic development of themselves, their families, and their communities. These may include: tiredness, weight loss, loss of appetite, boredom, depression, restlessness, confusion, and isolation.

Death

The researcher opines that this is grossly inadequate considering the weight of what widows pass through, which may even cost their lives. There are several instances of widows dying while observing widowhood rites and many dying after the rites. In fact, these widowhood practices affected their physical and mental health and infringed on their human and reproductive rights.

The Way Forward and Policy Reform for Widows' Welfare

On the way forward for widows and the generality of women, education, vocational skills acquisition, and enlightening programs have been seen in this study as antidotes to help widows resist those who may want to subject them to traumatizing widowhood rites. Education has been identified as a coping strategy for widows during the process of grief. Education depicts an individual widow's involvement in formal training for the purpose of acquiring the basic knowledge, skills, and expertise necessary for living a meaningful and impactful life. For widows to be free from all forms of abuse, the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and religious bodies have some roles to play. They should invest more in the education of the girl child. The

government in particular reaffirms that a girl child is educated at an early stage of life so as to become empowered, enlightened, and able to fight for themselves if eventually they find themselves in such a state. Moreover, the illiterate communities should, as a matter of fact, be educated, particularly on the way of handling the issue of widowhood. The government, through its agencies, legal practitioners, religious leaders, and all other stakeholders, should educate the illiterate communities that are still hiding under traditional practices to inflict hardship on women through unhealthy widowhood practices to desist from the practice. The way forward and policy reform for widows' welfare may include:

Vocational Skill Acquisition Program

Widows need to be economically empowered for them to be free from inhuman rites and practices. This can be achieved through vocational skill acquisition to expose them to all necessary economic opportunities as well as supportive services that can liberate them from unemployment, economic depression, and poverty. Vocational skill is a highly useful system because its occupational content offers the trainees the opportunity to acquire skills, attitudes, interests, and knowledge that they need to perform technologically and economically the job that is beneficial not only to them but to their society. Vocational skill makes it possible for widows and women generally to become employers of labor instead of applicants or job seekers, and such widows automatically become empowered economically. On the importance of vocational skills, Akpama and Arikpo, cited in Egbule (2019), asserted that the products of vocational skills are well equipped to be job creators, self-reliant, and employable. Vocational skills have therefore been promoted as an antidote to poverty among widows.

Engaging community leaders and influencers

Community leaders, religious figures, and influencers hold significant sway in shaping societal norms. Engaging them in discussions on cultural reform can have a powerful impact on dismantling harmful practices.

Legislative and policy reforms

Legislative changes are essential to creating a legal framework that protects the rights of widows. This may include measures to ensure inheritance rights as well as penalties for practices that infringe upon the dignity and well-being of widows.

Grassroots Movements

Grassroots organizations have been instrumental in driving change at the local level. Initiatives that provide support, education, and advocacy for widows have shown promising results in challenging harmful practices.

Collaborative efforts with NGOs and civil society

Partnerships between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups have proven effective in amplifying the voices of widows and advocating for their rights on a broader scale.

The Imperative of Inclusivity and Respect for Human Rights

Inclusivity should be at the heart of cultural practices. Respecting the rights and dignity of every individual, regardless of gender, is a fundamental principle that must be upheld.

Envisioning a More Equitable Future for Nigerian Women

By challenging harmful practices and advocating for cultural reform, we can work towards a future where Nigerian women, including widows, are treated with the dignity, respect, and equality they deserve.

Raising Awareness and Women's Education as a Major Tool for Coping with the Challenges of Widowhood

Education is a powerful tool for change. By empowering women with knowledge of their rights and supporting them in their pursuit of education and economic independence, we can break the cycle of discrimination. Unimaginable doors to opportunities can be unlocked through education. Every woman should make an effort to further her education since, thanks to it, she will be able to overcome her limits. It is a tool people can use to protect themselves and take control of their lives during a crucial time. A woman's education puts her in a position that will enable her to break through and advance her toward gaining financial independence. An emotional assault by her in-laws, friends, and family is not abruptly launched against an educated lady. One cannot overstate the value and advantages of education, even for women. However, it is crucial that parents provide their daughters with the best education possible because this is the best thing they can do for them. Additionally, educating the girls enables them to understand their rights as women, so it will be more difficult for her in-laws to subject her to degrading conventional widowhood rituals if she ever finds herself in such a circumstance. The government should actively work to advance and safeguard the rights of women (widows) by making sure that they fully implement and domesticate the legal instruments pertaining to human rights, especially those that speak about the abolition of all forms of discrimination against women.

Awareness campaigns can play a crucial role in challenging harmful practices and promoting gender equality. By engaging communities in open dialogue, misconceptions and stereotypes can be addressed. Babalola, cited in Adeyemo (2016), also pointed out that women who are in the best position to withstand the pressure to comply with widowhood rites are usually those who are educated and enlightened enough to challenge those trying to impose rites on them or wealthy enough to provide sums of money in lieu of compliance. In the same vein, Adeyemo (2014) reveals that the issue of staying in-doors for a long period for mourning rites is more pronounced among illiterate widows than the educated once. While the illiterate widows are compelled to stay indoors for as long as it is required by the family of the deceased, the educated and working-class widows will have to resume work at least three to four weeks after the incident. Evidence in this regard shows that widows who are educated and gainfully employed have sufficient resources to shield and secure themselves from any inhuman and degrading widowhood practice. Studies have also shown that widowhood rites and practices meted out to widows who are educated and have a means of livelihood are not the same as those who are less educated and are not economically empowered. The educated widows are economically empowered and are able to fight for their rights because of their financial capability (Emewu, 2003).

Amachukwu, cited in Egbule (2019), observed that a man's success depends greatly on the contribution of his wife, who, with a good education, performs her tasks effectively and efficiently in different facets of life. Economically, women with quality education generate resources for the family's well-being. They create income or wealth for the family through their good and befitting employment, whether in the private sector or civil service.

Conclusion

The Igbo culture's widowhood practices call for the intervention of all good people. The main barriers to women's advancement and development are widowhood practices. The pitiful, humiliating, and dehumanizing widowhood customs that widows must endure have been identified as

one of the difficulties of widowhood. Hence, this paper delves into the intricate tapestry of Nigeria's funerary culture and the prevailing widowhood practices that often perpetuate hardship and discrimination against Nigerian women. It critically examined the various customs and traditions surrounding death, burial, and the treatment of widows within the country. It has been established in this study that among the implications of widowhood are the pathetic, degrading, and dehumanizing rites that widows are subjected to. And for widows and women to be fully liberated, awareness programs should be given to them to inform them of some facts, particularly what widowhood entails. This paper provided an overview of the issues surrounding funerary culture and widowhood practices in Nigeria, along with suggestions for advocating cultural reform.

Recommendations

Addressing the complex widowhood practices in Nigeria requires a multi-dimensional approach. The following suggestions will significantly contribute to solving the predicament of Nigerian widows. These include:

- Governments and all other stakeholders should embark on programs that would enhance periodic information through enlightenment programs for widows and the generality of women, particularly on the issue of
- Women should be wise enough to encourage their husbands to write wills and also to formally concede properties to them while the man is still alive.
- It is suggested that the Igbo people revisit their culture and modify most of their cultural practices, particularly widowhood practices, which happen to constitute a major driving force behind gender discrimination and gender
- The government must enact legislation outlawing all objectionable widowhood practices. This is specifically intended to free widows from all types of misery brought on by widowhood.
- In areas where girls' education is currently being disregarded, such as Nigeria, it should be promoted. This will go a long way toward empowering women and encouraging them to reject primitive traditions and practices.
- There should be increasing assistance to widows by non-governmental organizations such as the Mums and Widows Association (MWA), the Widows Support Center (WSC), churches, and well-meaning
- Women's education should be pursued vigorously to empower them with knowledge about how to assert themselves. Oreh (2006) observed that no matter the challenges of a widow, coping is imminent, and education is a sure tool for effective coping strategies.
- Obsolete laws on widowhood practices, particularly the customary laws, now require radical modifications in line with the 21st century.

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