



Gender and widowhood: The effect of education and family socio-economic status on widowhood practices in South Eastern Nigeria

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Article Info

ISSN (online): 2582-7138

Volume: 03

Issue: 06

November-December 2022

Received: 27-09-2022

Accepted: 14-10-2022

Page No: 77-83

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.54660/anfo.2022.3.6.2>

Abstract

The issues of human right violation with regard to the dehumanizing treatment most women receive at the death of their husband mostly in Nigeria have raised a lot of discussion lately. In contribution to the topic, this study aimed to examine the effect of education and family socioeconomic status on widowhood practice in south eastern Nigeria. The study adopted quantitative research design and data for the study was gathered using a structured questionnaire distributed to widows in the five states that made up the South East geopolitical zone. Using both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics such as frequency tables, percentages and analysis of variance, the result of the analysis indicated that there was a significant relationship between education, family socioeconomic status and the practice of widowhood in the area. The study recommended that the government should provide avenues for adequate education for women.

Keywords: Access to finance, growth motivation, microenterprises, microenterprise growth, qualitative study

1. Introduction

The loss of a loved one is a traumatic experience for anyone. In Nigerian society, the death of a husband for many women is the worst experience and seems to be like the end of the world considering all the traumatic experiences associated with widowhood (Wuraola, 2016) ^[15]. Widowhood can be described as the conditions and practices a surviving partner is subjected to after the death of husband or wife. While a surviving male partner is referred to as a widower while the female surviving partner is referred to as a widow. According to the prohibition of infringement of a widow's/widower's Fundamental Rights Law 2001 Section 2 as cited in Adedeji (2019) a widow can be defined as any female married within the native law and custom, within the marriage act or other recognized law practicable in Nigeria that lost her husband and has not remarried. On the other hand under the same definition, a widower is considered to be a man that lost his legally, customary recognized wife and has not remarried. Nnodim, Albert and Isife (2017) ^[7] stated that widowhood for Nigerian women in most cases encompasses a period of emotional dispossession, agony, anxiety, torture and downgrading of women's fundamental human rights, deprivation of access to husband properties and other dehumanizing cultural isolation. These in most cases affect the physical and mental health of victims which are in most cases subjected to consuming unhygienic food in the worst possible environment.

Despite the global effort against violence and gender discrimination against woman, there still exist a very shameful and harmful tradition in most part of Nigeria, that tend to dehumanize women at the loss of their husband (Nwaoga, Uroko, Okoli & Okwusa, 2020) ^[8]. Prevalent empirical evidence such as the study of Afolayan (2019) ^[2] indicated that widowed women especially young woman between the ages of 20 to 35 are mostly inflicted with series of dehumanizing experience that mostly affect them psychologically, financially and sexually. Okorafor (2017) ^[10] stated that the kind of experience most women who lost their husband pass through from the day their husband died, to the day their husband was buried and thereafter is horrible and deserves condemnation. In a case of a wife's death, men are accorded the privilege of easily transiting from their mourning period to remarrying without any form of dehumanization. Same cannot be said about women that lost their husband that are subjected to a myriad of emotional and physical harassment, dispossession of husband properties, social stigma by family members of the dead husband (Adedeji, 2019) ^[11].

In south eastern Nigeria which is predominately dominated by the Igbo cultural practices, the practice of reverencing the dead has become a nightmare more especially on women in Igbo land. In the event of a death of an Igbo man, most of the cultural practices subject the wives of the deceased to some unnecessary but dehumanizing rituals. Some of these include, shaving off the hair, not bathing for days, isolated in a room for weeks, eating from a broken plate in any slightest speculation about the circumstance surrounding the man's death, the woman will be made to swear an oath as a proof of innocence (Nwogu, 2015) ^[9]. Most women are even denied their access to their husband's properties and inheritance because they don't have a male child. This practice has been more severe and harsh in the 50s and 60s though Tayo (2016) ^[14] claimed that the practice has lessened with the exposure through education and other vices.

As Tayo (2013) ^[13] stated, the development and adoption of useful factors for eradicating negative cultural norms such as widowhood and other ill traditions are dependent on factors such as education, social economic level among others. However, the cliché is that despite the advancement in education and social economic level in the southern part of Nigeria, the practice of widowhood although in fluctuating degree dependent on different tribes, are still in existence. It is on this premise therefore that this study intends to carry out an empirical investigation on gender and widowhood with more emphasis on the effect of education and social economic level on widowhood in south east Nigeria.

2. Statement of the Problem

In an ideal situation, the death of a spouse is supposed to attract every possible love and sympathy. It is supposed to be a period every family member; friends and well-wishers should provide emotional support to the bereaved. With the widespread education and the persistent improvement of social economic level of the people of south eastern Nigeria, it is expected that the evil practice of widowhood will be completely abolished and widows fundamental human rights adequately protected.

However, this evil practice regarded as widowhood practice has continued to eat death into the fabric of Nigerian society despite the improving level of education and social political status of the Nigerian people especially in the southeast region. Widows are still subjected to numerous ill treatments in the name of tradition and culture. These practices have thrown many women to depression, suicide, financial hardship and other ugly repercussion of dehumanizing and individual.

Considering the inherent danger this practice poses on the health and wellbeing of widows, it became paramount to investigate how integrating marketing mix as a strategy can be influential in improving value addition to the crop. Continuous neglect of the potential of this highly demanded crop will amount to economic waste and more shortage of nutritional food supply. Therefore, this necessitated the need to carry out this study in order to provide a piece of focused evidence on the impacts of education and family socio-economic status on widowhood practices in south eastern Nigeria. In other to achieve these broad objectives, the specific objectives to be considered are thus;

1. To ascertain the effect of education on widowhood in south east Nigeria.
2. To determine the effect of socioeconomic status on widowhood in south east Nigeria.

3. Brief Review of Literature

Review of literature was carried out to help highlight the concepts under study and provide an empirical gap from existing literature which this study intends to fill.

Conceptual Literature

Though the concept of widowhood has been a generally discussed topic globally, it is a topic that has generated many reactions from scholars mostly from Africa. Widowhood is considered as action and inactions that are followed after the loss of a marital partner. Bentina (2018) ^[3] described widowhood to be a particular period of marital union when one spouse has to mourn the death of the other partner in a particular traditional or cultural demand. As Onyekuru (2011) ^[11] stated, the death of a spouse is never a thing of joy however the follow up maltreatment of mostly the female partner which is regarded as widowhood is an unnecessary evil. Indeed, the condition associated with widowhood can be considered not only a personal loss of a loved one but encompasses as well the impact of the death to psychological and emotional maltreatment from those who are supposed to be family to the deceased partner. Nwaoga *et al.*, (2020) ^[8] stated that widowhood practices are a set of behaviors and actions by the widow, and of others towards the widow and rituals done for and behalf of the widow in the time of death of the spouse.

Education and Widowhood Practice

Education is considered as a development process that involves the enhancement of an individual's abilities and mindset to create a more useful human being to the society. It is a process of developing the skill, knowledge, attitude, reasoning, beliefs and societal norms that are valuable to the individual and to the society as a whole (Dinneya & Dokubo, 2020) ^[4]. Tayo (2013) ^[13] opined that education is a collective process in which an individual is exposed to his or her own inbuilt abilities and behaviors to shape his or her mind to be more productive. This implies that education is a continuous process that starts from childhood and possibly till death as the individual continuously discovers him or herself and new possibilities in the society.

As Elsie and Ugwu (2019) ^[5] stated, education is a powerful tool necessary for societal progress. It is also an important instrument that can equip women to be self-reliant and develop useful skills that will economically empower them to face the issues of widowhood. This will also enable them to make useful living and be able to take care of their children. Onyido (2016) ^[12] opine that if women are properly educated, it will inherently enhance their social economic status which will positively position them to face every life challenges. These will also expose them to their fundamental human right and step to take and make sure their rights and human beings are not violated. The children of educated widows are most likely to have a better opportunity of going to school and exploring their talents and abilities. Evidently, education is an important weapon that can eliminate the ill ideas of widowhood and woman discrimination in our present day society.

Empirical literature

Numerous empirical studies have been carried out related to widowhood practice in various parts of Nigeria. Mezieobi, Onyeausi, Nnaji, Eze and Adache (2021) ^[6] carried out a study on the health implications of widowhood practices

among Igbo widows in south eastern Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey design to gather data which was analyzed using frequency and mean. The result of the study indicated that most of the widowhood practices have a significant effect on the mental, physical and emotional health of widows in the region. Also, (Dinneya and Dokubo (2020) ^[4] carried out a study on the influence of cultural education programs on elimination of harmful widowhood cultural practices in Bende Local Government Area, Abia State. The study adopted a descriptive survey design on a sampled population of about 1091 members of Bende community in Abia state. The result of the study indicated that the adoption of cultural education programs has significantly reduced some widowhood practices such as oath taken and drinking remains of the water used to bathe the deceased husband.

Adedeji (2019) ^[1] carried out a study to determine the practice and correlates of widowhood rites in a city in North Central Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional design, and generated data from 450 respondents. The verdicts of the study showed that gender, religion, ethnicity, educational level, and occupation are among the significant factors associated with widowhood practice. Interestingly, Elsie and Ugwu (2019) ^[5] carried out a study on the influence of age and educational level on adjustment strategies to widowhood stress in Rivers State, Nigeria. The purpose of the study was designed to investigate the extent which education and age affects stress adjustment strategies of widows in River state. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and the result of the study indicated that widows in Rivers State vary significantly in their adjustment strategies with regards to handling widowhood stress.

Summary and literature gap

The review of empirical literature looked into the different directions, scope, objectives, methodology, and findings of the past studies to aid in identifying gaps in the literature related to this topic. The review was specifically centered on closely related studies both locally and internationally to have provided an empirical background for the study. The outcry of Nigerian women concerning the series of ill treatment that is passed to them when the husband dies has prompted more studies on widowhood practice and contemporary Nigerian society and Africa as a whole. The empirical review after a detailed examination identified literature gaps which formed the direction and bases for this study. The most notable issue is that most of the studies on widowhood practice such as Mezieobi, *et al.* (2021) ^[6] focused on health challenges that some of these widows undergo as a result of maltreatment from their husbands family members. Few studies such as tried to consider the possible effect of education on the reduction of widowhood practice Williams and Ugwu (2017) but it is scoped out South Eastern Nigerian which limited its coverage on the widowhood practice that is prevalent in the South eastern part of Nigeria. This study considering the evident literature gaps intends to study the effect of education and family socioeconomic status on widowhood practice in Nigeria.

4. Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The data for this study was sourced from primary and secondary

data. The primary data for this study was collected using a structured questionnaire to get responses from widows in the south eastern geopolitical zone. Secondary was gathered from already existing sources such as the internet, textbooks, journals and newspapers. This study is focused on widows from Enugu, Ebonyi, Anambra, Imo and Abia which are the states that constitute the south-east region of Nigeria. Evidence from the federal ministry of gender and woman affairs, indicated that the total population of widows in eastern Nigeria as at 2021 is about to be about 535,300 registered widows and the sample size for this study will be derived from this population. The population is distributed among the five states thus.

Table 1: Population Distribution by states in South East Nigeria

States	Population
Enugu	117000
Abia	141000
Ebonyi	137000
Anambra	127000
Imo	133000
Total	655000

Source: Ministry of Gender and Women's Affairs.

The sample size was determined at 5% error tolerance and 95% level of confidence. The formula adopted for determining the sample size for the study is that of Taro-Yamane (1964). The mathematical formula is given as;

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where;

n = desired sample size

N = population of study

e = Limit of tolerable error (using 5%)

1 = theoretical constant

$$\text{Therefore; } n = \frac{655000}{1+655000(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{655000}{1 + 1637.5}$$

$$n = \frac{655000}{1638.5}$$

$$n = 399.75. \text{ Approximately } 400$$

Therefore, 400 represent the sample size for the entire population. The sample size of each stratum was estimated using Bowley's proportional allocation statistical technique stated thus.

$$nh = \frac{nNh}{N}$$

Where,

nh = number of units allocated to each state, Nh = number of population of each state

N = the total population size under study, n = 400

Table 2: Allocation of Sample

NO	State	Computation	Population	Sample
1.	Enugu	$\frac{400 \times 117000}{535,300}$	117000	71
2.	Abia	$\frac{400 \times 141000}{535,300}$	141000	86
3.	Ebonyi	$\frac{400 \times 137000}{535,300}$	137000	84
4.	Anambra	$\frac{400 \times 127000}{535,300}$	127000	78
5.	Imo	$\frac{400 \times 133000}{535,300}$	133000	81
Total			655000	400

Source: Authors Computation

The instrument to be used for data collection is questionnaire which will be distributed with the help of a research assistant. The questionnaire is structured in a four point Likert-scale rating ranging from; strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Data generated using the four point Likert scale and presented in frequency tables. The four point Likert scale was presented as follows;

Strongly Agree (SA) – 4 points, Agreed (A) -3 points, Disagreed (D) -2 points, Strongly Disagreed (SD) – 1 point

The mean was calculated as $\frac{4+3+2+1}{4} = 2.50$

4

The reliability of the instrument was trial-tested using 10 persons selected from within the South East. Cronbach Alpha method was used to determine the internal consistency of the instruments. The formula for Cronbach Alpha is calculated thus;

$$\alpha = \frac{k}{k-1} \left(\frac{1 - \sum_{i=1}^K \delta^2 y_i}{\delta^2 x} \right)$$

Where:

α = Cronbach Alpha

K = number of item

δ = variance

The result indicated that the Cronbach Alpha α has a value of 0.9011. The result indicated a strong positive reliability of the instruments, which means that the instrument is reliable and has the ability to produce similar results when repeated under identical conditions. All the data will be entered and analyzed using SPSS. The demography data of the respondent will be presented in tables, frequencies and percentages using SPSS. The objectives of the study will be determined using mean calculated from the four point Likert-scale rating. To test the three hypotheses of the study, the study will use the analysis of variance (ANOVA).

5. Data Presentation and Analysis

Data Presentation and interpretation were done considering the reports of the distribution of the questionnaire, background information of the respondents and all the research questions before testing the hypothesis as follows.

Table 3: Distribution and Return of questionnaire

No of questionnaire distributed	No of usable questionnaire returned	No of lost and invalid copies of questionnaire	Returned questionnaire in percentage	Lost and invalid questionnaire in percentage
400	386	14	96.5	3.5

Source: Field survey, 2022

Table 4.1 shows that of the total number of 400 questionnaires distributed, 386 were returned valid for use which constituted 96.5% of the entire distributed question and is considered sufficient for the analysis. However, 14 of the distributed questionnaires were lost or eliminated due to serious omissions in response to some of the scale items.

Background information

Table 4: Distribution of respondents according to age

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18-30	134	34.6	34.6	15.4
31-65	252	65.4	65.4	87.4
Total	386	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey, 2022

The result in table 2 indicated that out of 386 respondents sampled, 253 among them with the valid percentage of 65.4% are of age within 31 to 65 years old while 134 respondents with the valid percentage of 34.6% are of age within 18 to 30 years old. The result indicates that the majority of the

respondents are within the age bracket of 31 to 65 and the least majority within the age of 18 to 30 years old.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents according to education level

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
FSLC	159	41%	41%	49.6
HND/BSC	82	21%	21%	61.1
PGD	27	7%	7%	70.2
Others	118	31%	31%	100
Total	386	100.0	100.0	

The result in table 5 indicated that 159 respondents with 41% are secondary school graduates, 82 respondents with 25.5% are degree holders, 27 respondents with 7% are post graduates degree holders while respondents in other categories with a population of 118 constitute 28% of the entire sampled population.

Research Question One: What is the effect of education on widowhood practice in South East Nigeria?

The response to research question one is contained in table five below.

Table 6: Analysis to determine the effect of education on widowhood practice in South East Nigeria

ITEM	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I consider myself to be educated	386	3.6971	.46081
Majority of my late husband's family members are educated.	386	2.4314	1.68806
My level of education exposed me to the knowledge of my fundamental human right.	386	3.1886	.89307
My education exposure help me to stand on my fundamental human right against widowhood practice	386	2.7371	1.26379
The educational exposure of my late husband's family members was instrumental to how I have been treated since after my husband's death.	386	3.0243	1.25008

The result as presented in table 6 indicated that respondents in agreement that they are educated have a mean score of 3.7 in approximation, which is above the cut of mean of 2.5. This indicated that a greater number of the respondents agreed to be educated. Respondents that are in agreement that their late husband's family members are educated has a mean score of 2.4, which is above the cut off mean of 2.5. This indicated that a greater number of the respondents disagreed that their late husband's family members are educated. Respondents that agreed that their education exposed them to know their fundamental human right had a mean score of 3.1 which is above the cut of mean of 2.5. This implies that a greater number of the respondents are in agreement that their education level exposed them to have the knowledge of my fundamental human right. Respondents in agreement that their education exposure helps them to stand on their fundamental human right against widowhood practice have a

mean score of 2.7 which is above the cut of mean of 2.5. This implies that a greater number of the respondents agreed that education exposure helped me to stand on their fundamental human right against widowhood practice. Respondents in agreement that educational exposure of their late husband's family members was instrumental to how they were treated since after their husband's death has a mean score of 3.02, which is above the cut of mean of 2.5. This implies that a greater number of the respondents agreed that educational exposure of their late husband's family members was instrumental to how they were treated after their husband's death.

Research Question two: What is the effect of socioeconomic status on widowhood in south east Nigeria? The answer to research question two is contained in table 7 below.

Table 7: Analysis to determine the effect of socioeconomic status on widowhood in south east Nigeria

ITEM	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I earn sustainable income	386	2.1429	.90156
My late husband's family members earn sustainable income	386	2.7829	1.30813
My late husband's family members are above average in social economic status	386	3.1086	.78395
The social economic status of my late husband's family members was instrumental to how I have been treated since after my husband's death	386	2.6943	.80929

The result as presented in table 8 indicated that respondents in disagreement that they earn sustainable income have a mean score of 2.1, which is below the cut of mean of 2.5. This indicated that a greater number of the respondents disagreed that they earn sustainable income. Respondents in agreement that their late husband's family members earn sustainable income have a mean score of 2.8 in approximation, which is above the cut of mean of 2.5. This indicated that a greater number of the respondents are in agreement that their late husband's family members earn sustainable income. This implies that a greater number of the respondents agreed that their late husband's family members earn sustainable income. Respondents that their late husband's family members are above average in social economic status has a mean score of 2.6 in approximation, which is above the cut of mean of 2.5. This implies that a greater number of the respondents agreed their late husband's family members are above average in social economic status. Respondents in agreement that the social economic status of their late husband's family members was instrumental to how they were treated since

after my husband's death has a mean score of 2.6 which is below the cut of mean of 2.5. This implies that a greater number of the respondents agreed that the social economic status of their late husband's family members was instrumental to how they were treated since after my husband's death,

Tests for Hypotheses

Hypothesis one is stated thus;

H₀: Education has no significant effect on widowhood in south east Nigeria.

H₁: Education has a significant effect on widowhood in south east Nigeria.

Decision criteria: In determining the significant effect, the study will accept or reject the hypothesis based on the significant value of the estimated result at 5% level of significance. The null hypothesis will be accepted if the significant value is greater than 0.05 and rejected if otherwise.

Table 8: Result of hypothesis one analysis

Anova					
Effect of education on widowhood practice in south east Nigeria.					
OIP	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	21.093	3	7.031	4.899	.003
Within Groups	348.761	286	1.435		
Total	369.854	289			

Source: Authors computation using SPSS

Decision: The result for hypothesis one above indicated that education has a significant effect on widowhood practice in south eastern Nigeria. The result proved to be significant with a significant value of 0.003 which is less than 0.05, therefore the null hypothesis which states that education has no significant effect on widowhood practice was rejected and the alternative accepted.

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis is stated thus;

H₀: Social economic status has no significant effect on

widowhood practice in south east Nigeria.

H₁: Social economic status has a significant effect on widowhood practice in south east Nigeria.

Decision criteria: In determining the significant effect, the study will accept or reject the hypothesis based on the significant value of the estimated result at 5% level of significance. The null hypothesis will be accepted if the significant value is greater than 0.05 and rejected if otherwise.

Table 9: Result of hypothesis two analysis

Anova					
Effect of socioeconomic status on widowhood practice in south east Nigeria.					
	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	67.234	7	9.605	18.890	.000
Within Groups	121.520	282	.508		
Total	181.753	289			

Source: Source: Authors computation using SPSS

Decision: The result for hypothesis two above indicated that socioeconomic status has a significant effect on widowhood practice in south east Nigeria. The result proved to be significant with a significant value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05, therefore the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative accepted.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study focused on the effect of education and family socio-economic status on widowhood practices in South Eastern Nigeria. This study using survey methods gathered responses from widows in the five states that made up the south Eastern region in Nigeria. It is evident from the study that education and family socio-economic status has a significant effect on widowhood practice in South Eastern Nigeria. For the first research question, a greater number of the respondents agreed that they are educated, that their level of education exposed me to the knowledge of their fundamental human right, that their education exposure helped me to stand on my fundamental human right against widowhood practice, that educational exposure of their late husband's family members was instrumental to how they were treated since after my husband's death. Also a greater number of the respondent disagreed that majority of their late husband's family members are educated. For the second research question, a greater number of the respondents agreed that their late husband's family members earn sustainable income. Also that their late husband's family members are above average in social economic status, that the social economic status of their late husband's family members was instrumental they were treated since after my husband's death. However, a greater number of respondents disagreed that they earn sustainable income. Considering the aforementioned findings and subsequent conclusion, this study recommend thus:

1. Government and every woman development agency should put more effort in designing women empowerment programs through education. This will equip women, especially widows with the necessary skill, knowledge and attitude to deal with their situations.
2. More sensitization programs should be organized to educate women on their fundamental human right and the proper channel to report issues of widows'

maltreatment and injustice.

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