

## THE IMPACT OF TRADITION ON WIDOWHOOD RITES AND PROPERTY RIGHTS ON WOMEN INEGOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF EDO STATE, NIGERIA

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### KEYWORDS

Bereavement, Rites, Tradition, Widowhood, Women.

### ABSTRACT

The study investigated the impact of tradition on widowhood rites and property rights on women in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. Two research questions guided the study. The study adopted the feminist legal theory as a theoretical framework of the study. Empirical review was also done in the study and it was discovered that the Egor's widowhood customs and property rights have not been researched. Also descriptive survey research design was adopted to determine the impact of tradition on widowhood rites and property rights on women in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. 384 residents were used as the sample size. There were major findings in this study such as during mourning period, widows are expected to sit on a bare floor or mat, She is to go into seclusion for seven days without bathing, Women cannot inherit any of her husband's property and the world is a man's own etc. The study recommended creation of awareness against negative practices towards any woman who lost her husband, general public should be educated against the negative practice, government should join hands in the fight against cruel widowhood rites, laws and policies should be enacted to protect women against cruel widowhood rites; and social workers should stand in the gap by advocating in the eliminating dehumanizing widowhood rites and claiming the rights of women in the inheritance of family's properties in Egor Local Government Area.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality remains a persistent global issue due to cultural and religious customs, resulting in continued mistreatment of women. Certain regions, notably Africa, demonstrate a tendency to view women as inferior citizens, denying them a voice and relegating them to the background (Adekanye, 2018). Nigeria exemplifies a patriarchal society that systematically suppresses

women's rights while privileging men. The situation worsens due to customs such as widowhood rites, a practice observed across Africa when a woman loses her husband Nzewi (2019). Numerous rituals are conducted in different parts of Africa, perpetuating these harmful norms.

The experience of widowhood is a deeply sorrowful event that occurs when an individual's spouse, whether it be the husband or wife,

tragically departs from this world, leaving behind a widow or widower. In Nigeria, the observance of widowhood customs is widespread, particularly among the Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa ethnic groups Agumagu (2017). These customs, ingrained since time immemorial, have been handed down through generations. Gender due to certain cultural imbalances. Widowhood entails a range of physical hardships, deprivation, ritual defilements, emotional instability, socio-economic challenges, and psychological traumas, with widows bearing the brunt of these burdens. Upon the demise of a spouse, a person assumes the marital status of a widow or widower (Destro & Keister, 2018).

A widow refers to a woman who has lost her partner, whereas a widower denotes a man in the same situation (Juma, 2016). It is essential to distinguish between widowhood and bereavement. Bereavement encompasses the state of losing a significant person, such as a spouse (Bernhard, 2019). Typically regarded as a transient phase focused on personal emotions, bereavement research commonly examines the two years following the loss. Conversely, widowhood refers to an ongoing and often protracted condition, encompassing social and personal implications and meanings (Abdallah & Ogbeide, 2020). Nonetheless, many studies fail to differentiate between bereavement and widowhood. Various African cultures prescribe specific rituals for grieving spouses who find themselves in widow or widower status, although these practices can undergo modifications based on cultural beliefs and circumstances. As per the writings of Gunga (2009), the phenomenon of widowhood cannot be separated from the deeply rooted customs and beliefs related to mortality, specters, bequests, female responsibilities, family systems, and kinship connections. An overwhelming conviction in the capacity of departed spirits to reappear and challenge or torment various entities and kinfolk has furthered and perpetuated the enduring traditions of widowhood in Africa (Oyeniyi & Ayodeji 2010). The notion that demise engenders decay and that departed souls maintain communication with the living, particularly their intimate life partners, stands as justification for subjecting widows to brutal and debasing customary enactments.

### **Statement of Research Problem**

Within numerous African societies, a patriarchal structure is prevalent, wherein women are assigned inferior roles and encounter extensive discrimination regarding widowhood traditions and property heritage. To illustrate, in the Benin culture, when a woman's demise occurs, the emphasis lies in consoling the man. In situations of monogamy, a lady may be permitted to stay overnight, and the widower might contemplate remarriage after an interval of six months to two or three years. In scenarios of polygamy, the widower finds solace effortlessly amongst his existing array of spouses Bangbose (2015). While the concept of widowhood should ideally be applicable to both genders, gender disparities have made it predominantly an issue faced by women. The situation for women in Benin is less favorable compared to men, as men receive social support and are subjected to minimal widowhood customs. The challenges endured by Nigerian widows are beyond words, as highlighted by Bangbose (2015) who aptly captures the severity of the circumstances. Moreover, in numerous regions of Nigeria, death is frequently attributed to non-natural causes.

When a woman passes away, it is commonly accepted as an inevitable event, even if there are suspicions surrounding the demise, the blame tends to fall on her rivals, such as co-wives or neighbors, with minimal accountability placed on her husband. The husband is met with more sympathy and support rather than suspicion and reproach. For instance, in certain cultural communities, it is customary for a woman to stay overnight with a man to ward off any supernatural disturbances caused by the spirit of his late wife. Bangbose (2015) suggests that a widower is openly offered pity, consolation, and encouragement to swiftly move forward, while ensuring prompt arrangements for a replacement. Essentially, the presence of the deceased wife's soul hinders a widower from sleeping alone. Despite the profound sorrow caused by a wife's passing, the widower generally receives increased societal aid to facilitate his adjustment and gradual assimilation into a new existence Faoranti & Davar (2019). The abrupt nature of death allows no room for testamentary dispositions or premeditated strategies, resulting in the state of widowhood.

Transferring property poses significant challenges, particularly in certain regions like the Egor Local Government Area in Edo State, where the established custom prevents women from inheriting assets (Oke, 2019). Women are frequently regarded as their spouse's possessions, which hinders their ability to possess any property themselves (Nzewi, 2019). The Benin culture demonstrates a strong attachment to property, as evident in the conventional partitioning of assets belonging to deceased male relatives. This scenario can be highly distressing for the widow when the family of the deceased insists on receiving the property solely, without considering the rights of the wife and children. In defiance of the established statutory and Islamic norms that grant women the right to inherit property when their husbands pass away, the Awori people residing in Ogun State, Nigeria, encounter a noticeable predicament. The practical implementation of legal or religious regulations frequently succumbs to customary laws of succession Samuel, (2011). Regrettably, this indigenous community commonly witnesses the deprivation of inheritance rights from women, as they fall victim to archaic customary rules.

### **Research Questions**

The following are the research questions that guided the study:

*What are the forms of widowhood rites of Egor Local Government Area?*

*What are the effects of widowhood property and inheritance rights on women of Egor Local Government Area?*

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The experience of widowhood, irrespective of its manifestation, can be an extremely distressing ordeal. Widowhood is characterized by the state of mourning (Schuster & Butler, 2019). In certain regions of Africa, widowhood is accompanied by a series of customary practices, aimed at guiding the widow through this transitional phase (Sulumba-kapuma, 2018). The African belief system concerning an existence beyond death plays a defining role in shaping the concept of widowhood. Widowhood denotes the

conjugal standing attained following the demise of a partner (Tamale, 2014). More specifically, a widow pertains to a female who has suffered the loss of her spouse, whereas a widower signifies a male in the same circumstance (Juma, 2016). It is imperative to draw a clear distinction between widowhood and bereavement.

Grief is the state of experiencing the loss of a significant person, specifically a partner (Bernhard, 2019). It is commonly regarded as a short-lived condition centered around personal emotions and meanings. Researchers often examine the occurrences within two years after the person's passing. In contrast, being a widow or widower entails a continual and frequently protracted situation with social and personal connotations (Abdallah&Ogbeide, 2020). Nevertheless, a considerable amount of investigations into individuals who have lost their spouse fail to acknowledge the distinction between grief and widowhood.

The loss of a spouse is a highly distressing event that adults often encounter, particularly as they advance in age (Atindanbila et al.,2015). This occurrence is more prevalent among women than men in numerous African societies, owing to the complex interplay of mortality differentials and marital age dynamics. Notably, men tend to have shorter lifespans than women, and women typically enter into marriages with men who are slightly older. Supporting this observation, available data indicates that in the United States during 2005, the widowed population accounted for 18% of men and a substantial 52% of women aged 75 to 84 years. Similarly, among those aged 85 and above, the corresponding proportions were 32% for men and a noteworthy 75% for women. Comparable trends have also been documented in diverse geographical settings. For instance, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2006) of the United Kingdom, in 2004, the widowed population constituted 16% of men and a considerable 45% of women aged 65 and over. In 2003, these percentages rose to 27% for men and an impressive 63% for women aged 75 and above.

### **Widowhood Rites**

As per Thompson's findings in 2014, the concept of ritual can be traced back to its Latin root "ritualis," signifying "belonging to a 'ritus'."

This term had relevance to ancient Roman temple services and the Catholic Church's worship during medieval Europe. On the other hand, ceremony, with its likely Etruscan origins, referred to priestly practices like nuptials and commemorations. In essence, a ritual embodies predetermined and symbolically infused actions within a community's specific framework (Thompson, 2014).

The notion of ritual is related to metalinguistic without explicitly assigning the label of "ritual" to any specific object or event or inherently ascribing it as a defining characteristic of such objects or events. Instead, it functions as an analytical instrument that can be utilized across a diverse array of circumstances or occurrences (Tamale, 2014). The term ritual is frequently utilized interchangeably with rite, ceremony, and occasionally liturgy or performance. A rite encompasses a compilation of actions, typically characterized by a sequence of ritualistic actions. Ritual, or ritual action, represents the core notion that encompasses one or more actions guided by stringent rules and infused with symbolism. Additionally, rituals exhibit repetitiveness with little or no divergence, leading to the formation of a tradition (Schuster & Butler, 2019).

The utilization of the term "ritual" and its corresponding vocabulary often pertained to the behaviors of "others," who were frequently deemed as inferior, primitive, or antiquated a connotation that persists in societal evaluations even to this day. The ritualistic activities encompass social processes through which an individual establishes a connection to society via the emblematic actions undertaken by adherents towards their deities or divine entities (Adler et al., 2017). This form of communal engagement functions as a reflection of a society's social framework. African widowhood rites are generally acknowledged as obligatory protocols for any grieving spouse transitioning into the state of widowhood. It is noteworthy to highlight that, while the practice exhibits no discernible gender bias, it primarily targets women. In the almost impossible scenario where a man finds himself amidst it, the circumstances tend to differ considerably. As per Nzewi, (2019), this age-old practice enjoys near-universal observance among the myriad ethnic groups in Ghana, albeit with occasional divergences in its implementation

(Davar 2019). Certain age-old societies harbor the notion that a man's ultimate demise results from the unfortunate nature of his spouse, whose ill-fate directly contributed to the unfortunate event. The treatment meted out to a widow in specific Ghanaian communities is founded upon this belief (Nzewi, 2019). These close-knit communities firmly hold that such a woman is destined to consecutively bury her second and third husbands, if she ever finds willing partners (Nzewi, 2019). In order to thwart this impending catastrophe, a widow must rid herself of the ill-fortune.

### **Widowhood Practices Overview: Nigerian Viewpoint**

Ladies who have lost their life partners due to unfortunate circumstances are known as widows. In numerous conventional African cultures, there exist rituals related to widowhood that are performed as a way to cope with the grieving process after the demise of a spouse. This phase of mourning is accompanied by a range of life events, some of which have far-reaching consequences. Despite being described as uncivilized, dreadful, morally objectionable, commoditizing, and violently infringing upon the sexual and human rights of the vulnerable, a few of these activities continue to persist in contemporary times (Nyanzi et al., 2022). Interestingly, it is women who often bear the brunt of these rituals, primarily due to societal perceptions influenced by gender, cultural norms, and the prevalence of patriarchal structures in numerous Nigerian communities. As a matter of fact, widowhood customs are observed by almost all ethnic groups in Nigeria, with the majority being constituted by the Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa peoples. Nevertheless, there is a wide array of customary customs found within racial communities (Olakitike, 2019). In a particular locality in Delta State, situated in the southern part of Nigeria, a distressing ordeal awaits widows after the demise of their spouses. They are compelled to endure a confined dwelling in an open area for a month following a week-long confinement period (Ewelukwa, 2012). This harsh procedure aims to enforce seclusion upon the widows, severely restrict their ability to socialize and move about, and even demands the removal of their hair during this grieving period.

After following the usual mourning customs, the widow's in-laws unfairly deny her access to her late spouse's belongings, preventing her from inheriting anything. We had two cars and lived in a two-bedroom flat in Lagos, Nigeria's southwest. UcheAnabude shared her unfortunate experience in the documentary mentioned earlier, expressing, "When my husband passed away, my life took a negative turn" (Till Death Do Us Part, 1998). This indicates that the widowhood rituals imposed on widows result in various forms of deprivation, leading to suffering such as poverty, confinement, and mistreatment (Anugwom, 2021; Samuel, 2021; UN, 2021).

Following the customary practices of the Yoruba community, widow women adhere to mourning periods lasting three, six, eleven, or twelve months. However, these customs, along with periods of seclusion, have experienced alterations influenced by societal advancements and religious convictions. In the case of MayowaAfolayan, my late brother's spouse, who tragically passed away on April 23, 2011, she faced a meager 21-day mourning period while confined behind bars. My mother disclosed that, despite the family's counsel for a forty-day grieving period, she opted to intervene due to her devout Christian faith and the shifting dynamics of contemporary society (excerpt from our discussion on October 10, 2011).

Given the sensitivity surrounding the matter at hand, my ruminations on this discourse took place in the cozy confines of my mother's abode. It is evident that the customary rituals pertaining to widowhood necessitate immediate adaptation to encompass a wide array of lawful provisions and the regulatory frameworks in different nations. This adjustment is indispensable owing to the myriad of individuals affected, taking into account their distinct cultural mores and religious convictions. It should be acknowledged that traditions, inseparable from civilization, are indubitably shaped by and exert influence upon civilization (Merry, 2016 & Menon, 2020).

Nonetheless, modifying the customary protocols associated with widowhood in specific Yoruba communities, just as my mother altered the timeframe for my late brother's wife's period of confinement and mourning, could prove to be a formidable task Bangbose (2015). This challenge

is particularly pronounced in the presence of ardent adherents to Yoruba traditions. Nevertheless, it remains imperative to fully grasp the societal and cultural norms underpinning these practices and to carefully analyze the conduct of each individual within that particular framework while crafting narratives around widowhood. Failure to do so might inadvertently impose one's own cultural inclinations and misconstrue the true essence of rituals associated with widowhood, which can manifest in distinctly dissimilar manifestations elsewhere in the same South-Western Nigeria.

The awareness of cultural sensitivity and the individual nature of culture must be emphasized (Juma, 2016). Divergent customs can be observed within distinct Yoruba communities, making it imperative to acknowledge these dissimilarities. Once the general perspective on Nigerian rituals for widows is outlined, we shall delve into the specific historical and cultural aspects of Yoruba widowhood traditions. The widowhood practices in the region of South-Western Nigeria are inextricably entwined with a rich tapestry of history and culture.

### **III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **Legal Theory of Women**

The development of this theory can be attributed to Dalton, (1963) and the collaborative work of Bridget, Linda, and Stanchi (2016). Feminist legal philosophy posits that women have not received fair and equal treatment under the law when compared to men. According to an esteemed scholar named Claire Dalton, the primary objectives of feminist legal theory encompass understanding and evaluating the experiences of individuals identifying as female, investigating potential discriminatory practices within legal systems and institutions, and formulating strategies for improvement. Our research will explore the intricate relationship between feminist theory, the concept of gender, and the application of legal principles to specific areas of interest. The genesis of feminist legal theory stems from the inadequacies inherent in the present system, which fail to address the preconceptions and biases experienced by women, particularly in cases of discrimination resulting from the intersectionality of various identities. This framework endeavors to examine the mechanisms

that perpetuate gender inequality, elucidate the underlying causes of female oppression, explore the subjective experiences of women subjected to disparate treatment due to their gender, and propose a range of potential solutions to address these systemic issues. As stated by Shannon (2007), there exists an undeniable correlation between the limited access of women to governmental, social, political, and economic institutions and their subjugation. Shannon suggests taking measures to empower women in public arenas, including employment, politics, and education, while ensuring equal legal rights. Ewelukwa (2012) concurs with this notion, contending that the primary cause of women's subordination lies in their sexuality, a perspective akin to Shannon's (2007) assertion. Ewelukwa posits that social establishments such as medicine and religion, alongside instances of mistreatment and objectification, govern the exploitation of women's bodies. Furthermore, Gutting's study (2002) demonstrates how gender inequity persists through the repetitive enactment and exhibition of gendered identities.

According to Gutting (2002), one way to tackle gender inequity is through queering, which involves merging gendered characteristics and questioning established standards of sexuality and gender. The study's emphasis on contrasting widowhood rituals between husbands and wives adds relevance to this research. Each gender has its own set of widowhood customs. Women frequently experience numerous distressing rituals, including humiliating practices, while men receive solace and potentially the companionship of a female counterpart. Hence, the adoption of this theory can be justified as it supports the study's conceptual framework.

The movement for women is a cause that encompasses political, cultural, and economic aspects, striving for parity in rights and legal safeguards. Feminism, which finds its linguistic origin in the Latin term for "woman," represents an ideology or philosophical concept centered around women. In her work titled "Recreating Ourselves: African Women Critical Transformations," MolarOgundipe-Leslie views feminism as an exploration of women's place in society, while avoiding direct confrontation. It encompasses a struggle for significance in politics,

a quest for autonomy and fairness. It scrutinizes the role men play in the oppression and emancipation of women on a global scale, stressing the imperative nature of rebelling against patriarchal dominance in order to secure women's emancipation. The theoretical frameworks stemming from these movements, seeking to fathom the root causes of societal inequalities, have expanded across various academic disciplines to address significant concerns like the societal construction of gender.

**IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This method was suitable for the study because it concentrated on quantifying the collection and analysis of data through the use of a structured questionnaire and was able to cover a large population study by selecting a sample for the population of study. The study was predominantly done in the Edo State's Egor Local Government Area (LGA). Thus, it was a micro study conducted Nigerian Edo State, with the goal of determining how traditions have affected widows in the local government area of Egor. Egor Local Government Area's population is 339, 899. (2006 Nigeria population census but the projected population is about 502,700 2022).

A sample size of 384 residents in Egor L.G.A. of Edo State formed the sample population. The total population in Egor is 339, 899 (Nigeria Population Census 2006) but the projected population is about 502,700 (2022). Using the figures, the desired Sample size is determined by the Conchran (1977) formula.

$$N = Z^2P \frac{(1 - P)}{e^2}$$

Where: N = Sample population

Z = Statistics level of confidence (1.96)

P = Expected prevalence (0.50)

1 = Constant

e = error (0.05)

$$\text{Sample Population} = \frac{1.962 (0.50 (1 - 0.50))}{0.05^2}$$

$$= \frac{3.8416 [0.50(0.50)]}{0.0025} = 384$$

Hence, 384 Benin persons formed the sample population. And 384 questionnaires were administered in the selected communities and houses using convenient sampling techniques.

**Table 1** Socio- Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

VARIABLES	DISTRIBUTION	
	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
SEX		
Male	141	36.7
Female	243	63.3
AGE		
26-35yrs	28	7.3
36-45yrs	129	33.6
46-55yrs	154	40.1
Above 55 years	73	19
Marital Status		
Single	91	24.2
Married	177	46.1
Other	114	29.7
Religion		
Christianity	157	40.9
Muslim	96	25
Traditional	53	13.8
Others	78	20.3
TOTAL	384	100

Source: Author’s fieldwork 2023.

The socio-demographic results presented in Table .1 showed the demographic distribution of male respondents. The result in the table showed that 141(36.3%) of the respondents were males, while 243(63.3%) of the respondents were females. This implies that majority of the respondents were females. The result in the table also showed that 28(7.3%) of the respondents were within the age group of 26-35years, 129(33.6%) were within the age group of 36-45years, 154(40.1) were within the age range of 46-55years, while 73(19%) were above 55years. Hence, majority of the respondents were within the age range of 46-

55years. Furthermore, the result in the table showed that 91(24.2%) of the respondents were single, 177(46.1%) were married, while 114 (29.7%) fell under other category. This implies that majority of the respondents were married. Lastly, the result in the table showed that 157(40.9%) were Christians, 96(25%) were Muslims, 53(13.8%) were traditionalist, while 78(20.3) fell under other category. Therefore, majority of the respondents were Christians. Research Questions 1: What are the forms of widowhood rites on women in Egor Local Government Area?

**Table 2** Forms of Widowhood Rites on Women

SN	VARIABLES	Mean $\bar{x}$	Std. Deviation	Remark
1	During mourning period she is expected to sit on a bare floor or mat.	3.32	.441	Agreed
2	She is to go into seclusion for seven days without bathing or changing cloths during the period	3.48	.413	Agreed
3	At the end of mourning period, the widow is inherited by a male relative of her deceased husband along with other property	1.72	.417	Disagreed
4	The widow may be accused of killing her husband, to prove her innocence she may be ask to swear by any traditional means or drink the water use to bath her deceased husband	3.15	.428	Agreed

5	She is expected to eat with unwashed plates and unwashed hands for seven days	1.54	.415	Disagreed
	GROUP MEAN	2.76	.420	DISAGREED

Source: Fieldwork 2023

Results from Table 2 showed that item 1, which is during mourning period, she is expected to sit on a bare floor or mat, which has a mean of 3.32 and standard deviation of .441; item 2, which is, She is to go into seclusion for seven days without bathing or changing cloths during the period has a mean of 3.48 and standard deviation of .413; similarly, item 3, which is, At the end of mourning period, the widow is inherited by a male relative of her deceased husband along with other property has a mean of 1.72 and standard deviation of .417; more so, item 4, which is The widow may be accused of killing her husband, to prove her innocence she may be ask to swear by any traditional means or drink the water use to bath her deceased husband has a mean of 3.15

and standard deviation of .428; also, item 5, which is, She is expected to eat with unwashed plates and unwashed hands for seven days has a mean of 1.54 and standard deviation of .315. Conclusively, the forms of widowhood rites in Egor L.G.A include: during mourning period, she is expected to sit on a bare floor or mat, She is to go into seclusion for seven days without bathing or changing cloths during the period and The widow may be accused of killing her husband, to prove her innocence she may be ask to swear by any traditional means or drink the water use to bath her deceased husband.

Research Questions 2: What is the effect of widowhood property and inheritance rites on women of Egor Local Government Area?

**Table 3** The Effect of Widowhood Property and Inheritance Rites on Women

SN	VARIABLES	Mean $\bar{x}$	Std. Deviation	Remark
1	Deprivation of husband's properties	3.56	.458	Agreed
2	Women are subjected to a lot of dehumanizing treatment	3.02	.417	Agreed
3	The widow suffer enormous emotional and physical pain	3.15	.428	Agreed
4	The widow is sometimes stigmatized.	3.14	.415	Agreed
5	The widow is subjected to untold hardship and maltreatment	3.45	.411	Agreed
	TOTAL	3.36	.464	AGREED

Source: Fieldwork 2023.

Results from Table 3 showed that item 1, which is Deprivation of husband's properties indications a mean of 3.56 and a standard deviation of .458. Item 2, which is women are subjected to a lot of dehumanizing treatment has a mean of 3.02 and a standard deviation of .417. Item 3, which is the widow suffer enormous emotional and physical pain has a mean of 3.15. and a standard deviation of .428. Item 4, which is the widow is sometimes stigmatized shows a mean of 3.14 and a standard deviation of .415 and Item 5, which is the widow is subjected to untold hardship and maltreatment has a mean of 3.45

and a standard deviation of .411. This implies that the effects of widowhood property and inheritance rights on women in Egor Local Government Area include: deprivation of husband's properties, women are subjected to a lot of dehumanizing treatment, the widow suffers enormous emotional and physical pain, she is sometimes stigmatized and she is subjected to untold hardship and maltreatment.

**Discussion of Research Findings**

The result from the field established that the forms of widowhood rites in Egor Local Government Area include: during mourning period



widow is expected to sit on a bare floor or mat, She is to go into seclusion for seven days without bathing or changing cloths during the period and The widow may be alleged of killing her husband, to prove her innocence she may be ask to swear by any traditional means or thirst the water use to bath her deceased husband. This finding is in line with Samuel, (2021) who posited that widows are sometimes denied access to food and held in dark chambers for days. A Nigerian widow Mrs. N.E, who was interviewed for the 1998 documentary 'Till Death do us Part", said that until my spouse was laid to rest, I was not permitted to eat or drink..." During this time of grieving, they forced me to share a bedroom with my deceased husband and compelled to drink the used water to bathe him. Ewelukwa, (2012) also supported this claim by observing that in one of the neighborhood in Delta State, South-South, Nigeria region widows must spend the first thirty days after the death of their husbands in a cramped outdoor hut in mourning followed by a first seven-day confinement. Corroboration with Ewelukwa (2021) assertions, Amstrong et al. (2019) asserted that there are so many shapes and forms of widowhood rites practices which are cruel, barbarous, and inhumane activities that put women's lives in jeopardy in Africa.

The result from objective two revealed that effects of widowhood property and inheritance riteson women in Egor Local Government Area include: deprivation of husband's properties, women are subjected to a lot of dehumanizing treatments, the widows suffers enormous emotional and physical pain, They are sometimes stigmatized and subjected to untold hardships and maltreatments. This corroborates Ozioma (2023) position, who in her study asserted that women in some African societies are perceived as a stranger among her husband's family despite being married for a long time. Relatives are ready to throw her out like a useless appendage the moment her husband is dead. This often makes the widow to wallow in poverty and also a widow is also devastated by certain cultural practices which make her to undergo certain degrading rites in the process of mourning her late husband.

Furthermore Uzodinma (2019) also stated in his study that some cases, a widow could be

asked to marry the junior brother of the late husband and the event a widow refused such an offer, she is disowned by the late husband's family and banned from inheriting any of the dead man's property while all the household properties would be carted away by the family members especially where the widow does not come from the same town as the deceased husband. Such women have had to rely on the help and assistance from her family, friends and social organizations to which they belonged in order to cater for themselves and the children. This finding is also in line with Amstrong et al. (2019) who in their study asserted that there are so many shapes and forms of widowhood rite practices which are cruel, barbarous, and inhumane that put women's lives in jeopardy in Africa.

Moreover, the result from objective three established that the perceptions of the family members of the widows in Egor Local Government Area are among others that Widow has no right over demised husband's property, widows are expected to be seen and not heard by men, women are not supposed to inherit any of their husband's property because man is in charge. This is in tandem with Browning (2017), who asserted that there is mounting evidence that majority of widows whose spouses died or passed away live in squalor and abject poverty throughout most sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria. This is due to their in-laws actions, who ought to help them cope with the loss, rather deny them access to their husband's belongings and treat them inhumanely. This also confirms Ogundipe (2021), who observed that when widows endure unimaginable hardships and maltreatments by their in-laws and the society at large, it is demeaning. Widows are therefore in a terrible situation because they are underprivileged citizens and neglected by those who should be providing them with support and assistance.

Furthermore, the result from objective four showed that the forms of remediation to the effect of widowhood rites on women in Egor Local Government Area include: enlightenment and being educated about their rights, campaign should be against cruel widowhood rites, the government should be involved in the fight against cruel widowhood rites. Others are that laws should be promulgated and policies developed to protect

women against cruel widowhood rites. Also in agreement with United Nations Human Right Charter (2015), which recommend that there is sustained subsequent efforts which protect women from gender-based violence as put forward by the Declaration of the Elimination of Violence against Women adopted by the UN General Assembly (2015), Article 20 of that declaration which agree with the findings of this study in the following ways: Widows should not be subjected to inhuman, humiliating and degrading treatment; that a widow shall automatically become guardian and custodian of her children unless it is contrary to the interest and welfare of the children themselves and that a widow has the right to remarry and to whomsoever she chooses. On the right of inheritance, the protocol in Article 21 maintains that a widow shall have the right to an equitable share in the inheritance of the property of her husband: to continue to live in the matrimonial home and if remarried, she has the right of ownership of property belonging to her in her first marriage.

### **I. CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher hereby concluded that widowhood rites are not a pleasant experience among women in Africa, particularly in Egor Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria. The humiliation and bitter treatment inflicted on them has negative effect on them psychologically and socio-economically. Recovering from the shock as a result of inhuman treatment will require the assistance of rehabilitating professionals. Many widows suffer enormous emotional and physical pain, she is sometimes stigmatized and she is subjected to untold hardship and maltreatment. The general public, men, family members should be enlightened against cruel widowhood rites, government should join hands in the fight against the acts and laws and policies should be enacted to protect women against cruel widowhood rites. Finally, social workers should advocate against the dehumanization and claiming the rights of women in the society.

### **II. RECOMMENDATIONS**

*Based on the findings of the study and the conclusion, the*

*following recommendations were made:*

*The government and social workers should join in the fight against cruel forms of widowhood rites against women in Egor.*

*The general public and family members of the demised husband should ensure that they do not add to the emotional pain the woman is going through as a result of her husband's demise.*

*Social workers should run campaigns to educate the general public on women's right in the family and over her husband's property.*

### **III. RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

*The government and social workers should join in the fight against cruel forms of widowhood rites against women in Egor.*

*The general public and family members of the demised husband should ensure that they do not add to the emotional pain the woman is going through as a result of her husband's demise.*

*Social workers should run campaigns to educate the general public on women's right in the family and over her husband's property.*

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