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MODERNIZATION AND WIDOWHOOD PRACTICE IN ABRIBA, OHAFIA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ABIA STATE

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ABSTRACT

Most African indigenous androcentric societies express their displeasure at the changes brought about by modernization. For instance, members of the Abriba community, especially the older generation, consider the changes/alterations experienced in the marriage institution as a decline in cultural values: one not marrying outside one's clan. This attitude is a good example of how gender relations have construed society. At a second look and consideration of such displeasure, in the light of social change and modernization, one is forced to ask whether the changes that occur daily in our indigenous societies are actually of negative effect. Using percentages to analyze data got through a simple random technique this study discusses the effects of modernization on widowhood practices in Abriba and discovers that most marriageable girls in Abriba as a result of the obnoxious widowhood practices in Abriba and exposure to forces of modernization marry outside their ethnic group contrary to what was obtainable in Abriba before now. This is simply a reflection of male dominant structures that suppress women's assertion. While highlighting the socio-economic effects of such changes on Abriba society, it recommends that Abriba people should abolish traditional widowhood practices that infringe upon the fundamental human right of Abriba women to inherit their late husbands' properties.

Keywords: Culture, Gender, Feminism, Widowhood, Abriba, Modernization.

INTRODUCTION

T Uwa mmebi (a spoilt world) is an Igbo phrase employed by most Igbo indigenous societies to express their displeasure at the changes brought about by modernization. At a second look and consideration of such displeasure, in the light of social change and modernization, one is forced to ask whether the changes that occur daily in our indigenous societies are actually of negative effect. There are divided opinions as to whether such alterations in our socio-cultural institutions are salutary or un-salutary. A clear insight to the above discuss would best be underscored in a discourse on the effects of modernization and widowhood practices among African indigenous societies in general, and Abriba in particular.

Modernization and its attendant consequences, which have rocked various African societies, have brought about a change on a composite social structural

institution of Abriba society. The marriage institution in Abriba has recently been altered due to the inhuman treatment women inflict upon their fellow widowed folks in that society. For fear of facing the inhuman treatment meted out against women in that society, especially the plundering of the deceased's "wealth" cum denial of widows' right to inherit their late husbands' properties (which impoverishes the widow and her children), most Abriba girls now marry outside their ethnic group. This practice of marrying outside their ethnic group was not acceptable in the past: the Abriba do not marry out their daughters to members of other ethnic groups. Reason being that when a woman dies, she is buried in her first daughter's marital home. So if the daughters' are marry outside the clan a challenge is then posed, where would the deceased woman be buried? This change/alteration in the marriage institution, as a result of the inhuman treatment widows experience in that society, especially the denial of inheriting one's husbands properties, has its concomitant consequences on that society.

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Since members of the Atriba community, especially the older generation, consider the changes/alterations experienced in the marriage institution as a decline in cultural values: one not marrying outside one's clan, one is made to ponder on a number of questions associated with widowhood practices and modernization in Atriba society, especially on the marriage institution. Are the "victims" of widowhood practices in Atriba indigenous society less concerned with such practices? Do the younger female members of that society marry outside their clan due to the inhuman treatment, especially the taking over of the deceased's property, which widows experience in that society? Are there enough empirical evidences? Does this alteration affect the socio-economic development of Atriba community? Are there modalities to put in place to check on the massive drift of marriageable of Atriba girls to other Igbo and non-Igbo ethnic groups? The main thrust of this study, therefore, is to repudiate the saying that the alteration on the marriage institution in Atriba is "*uwa mmebi*", rather, to prove that such alterations are viable and much needed precursors of socio-economic and political development. In the light of the above, the study would proffer solutions on the way forward in terms of modernization and widowhood practices in Atriba, Ohafia Local Government Area of Abia State. These and other issues informed the quest for this research, "Modernization and Widowhood Practices in Atriba, Ohafia Local Government Area of Abia State".

Research Questions

1. The research questions of the study are as follows:
2. Is there a significant relationship between widowhood practices and the drift of marriageable female Atriba girls to other Igbo and non-Igbo ethnic groups?
3. Is there any significant relationship between modernization and widowhood practices in Atriba?
4. Is there any significant relationship between widowhood practices and the socioeconomic development of Atriba community?

Hypotheses: The hypotheses of this study include the following:

1. There is no significant relationship between widowhood practices in Atriba and the poor living conditions of women there.
2. There is no significant relationship between the level of education and the drift of marriageable Atriba females to other ethnic groups.

3. There is no significant relationship between property ownership and the devaluation of women in Atriba.

Conceptual Analysis: Several volumes have been written on feminism. What has been rendered historical visible by making women a subject of study, is in the first place, their subjection; in the second place is their subject (Odili 2012a; Odili 2012b; and Owete and Odili 2013). Expressions that occur frequently in such studies include 'inferior' 'male-dominated' 'marginalized', 'patriarchy', 'stereotyping', 'sexual objectification', and 'oppression'. Another term that stirs up negative feelings is feminism. Some scholars (Sofola, 1997:51) are reluctant to advocate feminism because they are uncertain about the meaning of the term. With respect to Africa, some critics 'avoid the term feminism on the ground that it is an important concept detached from traditional values and disruptive of African women's mind. In the description of the situation in African, Hudson-Weems (1998) suggested 'African Womanism'. Any analysis of women in contemporary Nigerian society stops prematurely if it does not dare to tackle the broad issue of culture which encompasses the main factors of the Nigerian reality which influences our lives. Such analysis should by no means exclude the socio-cultural, linguistics, and the ethnic dimensions of the Nigerian cultural existence as each of these aspects has had tremendous impact on the status of women in our society. Culture as an ideological factor is not only used to justify male actions and interests, but also distorts our own knowledge of serial reality, which culminates in 'false consciousness.' Odili (2010) asserts that in most Nigerian traditional societies there are several ways in which women are restrained from attaining equal status with men. For instance, most Nigerian societies prefer having a male child as first born. A wife may be divorced for not having a male child. On a general societal level, patrilineal descent is preferred to matrilineal descent. In most communities, when a woman marries she renounces her family right in terms of properties and inheritance. In some, she does not have right whether married or unmarried. Rites of passage are culturally legitimated way of expressing and ensuring women's subordination. Menstrual taboos and circumcision rights keep women apart, and certain "secret societies" are meant for menopausal females.

Some aspects of widowhood rite subject women to psychological trauma. Widows are usually confined to a

place for over long period of time during which they sleep on the bare floor or rags. Some anachronisms in Nigerian customs and traditions are centered on widowhood. Apart from these, psychological violence is manifested in mental punishment. This involves cases where husbands or in-laws resort to abusive language and cursing. Oduyoye (2002) categorizes it as a socio-cultural form of violence against women. She labels it verbal violence which is also manifested in lyrics of songs. This operates often in polygamous setting, and its occurrence often involves women. This is androcentric plot to pitch women against each other.

The most common type of physical violence against women in Nigeria is wife beating. In India, wife battering has been widely perpetuated, culminating in the proverbs, 'Women you should not weep when you are beaten' and, 'Never trust a woman when she raises alarm'. A heavy cloak of silence is drawn over this domestic violence in Nigeria, especially in the area of widowhood practice. The fact of its being regarded as a controversial practice is stressed by Oduyoye (2002:167).

Even worse still is to hear women talk about the beating they receive as normal pelt of their marriage relations. Some men on the other hand see it as a duty and are proud to declare their compliance.

The phrase "violence against women" in Nigeria is a misnomer (Adetoun 1992:3 13). In indigenous societies, twin mothers were ostracized, and wives of kings, for instance, in Efik, were obliged to accompany them to the grave on their journeys to the next world (Hackett 1985:254). Commenting on the general role of women in an indigenous African society, Omosade (1976:95) states that, 'Women hardly decides anything on their own; even the small details of her daily life are sewed by her husband.'

Socio-Cultural Bases for Widowhood Practices:

Several feminist scholars such as Obbo (1980), Emecheta (1986), Ekefre (1990), Odu-Mark (1994) Nwapa (1996), Okpara (1996), Onyemadume (1996), and Dawuda (1998) have added their voice to the issue of gender in equality in Africa. A comparative history of women in Igbo and Hausa cultures has not been adequately studied. In the past, such neglect reflected the general state of African historiography; focus was on visible political institutions, diplomatic events and intellectual currents of the high, as opposed to the popular culture. When issues that bother on a popular

culture are addressed, they are so do from masculine lens (Tucker 1985:1). The representation of African women in historical writing according to A. Imam (1988:30) has been characterized by four approaches;

1. In the first (and most obvious) case, women have simply not been presented at all.
2. In the second they are seen as inferiors and subordinates to men.
3. The third trend has been a conception of women's role as equal and contemporary to those of men.
4. Finally, there has been a movement towards seeing women as active agents in the historical process.

A world view that relegates women to the background has obvious implications for the treatment of the role of women in historical reconstruction.

It is widely known that although all enduring marriages ultimately end with the death of either a husband or a wife or even both, the traumatic experience which accompanies the death of a husband tends to be greater than that which accompanies the death of a wife. Irrespective of the type of marriage contracted and the personal love of deceased husbands, widows are subjected to various deriding and terrible rites which intensely vary in cultures and localities. Some of these rites violate some of the fundamental human rights of widows. Studies on various ethnic groups in Nigeria have revealed that following the demise of a husband a widow is expected to wail. Although other members of the family are expected to wail that of the widow is, as custom and tradition demand, expected to be more pronounced. Depending upon the quality of the inter personal relationship that existed between a widow and her inlaws before the demise of her husband, the relatives could taunt and criticize widow a for not wailing enough and, and as such, administer physical punishments for the widow. If the wailings were adjudged as inadequate, the widow is accused of being responsible for the death of her husband. In most Nigeria societies this is accompanied with beating administered by the womenfolk related to the deceased. In Efuru by Flora Nwapa (1966), we are told of how Efuru was subjugated as a mere property which could be used and dumped at any point in time. She was given a mental torture by her husband in spite of her industriousness. Efuru tried everything within her power to save her marriage with Adizua, her first husband, but Adizua deserted her to another town where he cohabited with another woman. When her first

marriage failed, she decided to come back to her patriarchal home, but she was advised in a bitter way to go back to her husband. Out of frustration, she re-married but suffered the same fate because she had no child. It was at this second heart break that she decided not to marry again and become independent of the patriarchal and matrimonial home, yet people kept on pointing accusing fingers on her.

Emecheta (1986) highlighted how women are regarded as second class citizens in every aspect of life, educationally, economically, and socio-culturally. The woman in the novel was the life wire of her education because her presence as the first issue in the family was not funny. When she went to school by force the father encouraged her, but this liberty was obstructed by the death of her father. The hundred pounds in her father's savings account was relegated to her younger brother's education. Fate saw her through her education. When she married, her husband was afraid; Ada's salary was far bigger than his. Ada was manipulated, intimidated, suppressed, and oppressed in spite of her position in her matrimonial home. On the other hand, in her paternal home, the extended family expected Ada's husband to pay a huge bride's wealth because Ada was a graduate, notwithstanding that she was the architect of her education.

Onyewadume (1996) highlighted how hitherto women have no contribution in any family affairs, rather, she is to support whatever decisions taken by her husband whether good or bad. A woman's advice is neglected in spite of its usefulness. When a woman objects to certain decision(s), she is accused of challenging the man's authority, especially if the woman is a member of any social group. Onyewadume explained further the second fiddle assigned to the female folks in our societies. When the echoes of hard time blew, it was the girls in Jide's family that suffered most. Jide asked the girls to stop school and reserve his little income for the education of his only son. As if this is not enough, he forced his first daughter to get married as a fourth wife to a wealthy chief so as to supplement the education of his only son. At this point in time, the wife planned for a way forward and save the daughter from their father's humiliation. The daughter on the other hand refused to marry the wealthy chief and insisted that she must finish her education before getting into marriage. Later the man was made to realize that a well-trained woman can govern the world even better than the men. Therefore,

women should be given better education so as to allow them grow economically, politically, and socially.

Nwapa (1978) takes us to look at an Igbo society where late marriage is almost a taboo. Furthermore, when the woman in question (Amaka) got married, she was faced with the problem of childlessness which eventually led to break down of the marriage. She was taunted and reduced to a mere tenant in her home. The crux of the matter was that she received the worse treatment from her mother-in-law who is also a woman. As if the taunts were not enough, mother and son planned and married another woman, had two children by the woman without telling the first wife. Amaka was unable to withstand the after effect and this led to their separation. She liberated herself from the ordeal, decided to be on her own in spite of protest from her mother and sister. When she eventually had a son, she refused to marry the father of her son so as to free him from the problem of denial of inheritance from greedy and oppressive extended family.

Basdan (1966) in his study assert that after the wailing period, widows were ritually secluded within their husband's houses or in special huts. Widows experience several degradations and deprivation during the seclusion period that last between seven to fourteen weeks among different ethnic groups. Several practices were enacted to make widows uncomfortable and unattractive to men who allegedly might take sexual interest in them. In some parts of Nigeria, widows wear mourning cloths that are never washed or changed except in cases where the widow can afford more than one set of mourning cloths. Basdan (1966) further reports that, in some areas, widows were denied good food, baths and other comforts.

In 1989, Better Life survey carried out a survey on widows in several states which includes Plateau, Edo, and Imo States and indicated the examples of widows degradation mentioned earlier on, are not hysterical relieve but are still current in those state and even beyond. Nzewi (1989) documented that widowhood begins immediately after the announcement of a husband's demise. The relatives demand documents pertaining to their brother's property including land, bank account and personal property. Subsequently, widows were required to provide expensive items which include goats and jars of palm wine for purification purpose by the female members of the husband's lineage who made and executed decisions on every matter concerning widows.

Several explanations were being offered for the harsh treatment meted out to widows in several parts of the country. It has been mentioned that the prevalence of witchcraft accusations and the belief that death when it occurs to persons especially when they are relatively young is caused by sorcery or witchcraft is partly responsible for the special difficulties which widows experience, especially in a polygamous family. The belief is that a woman could eliminate her husband out of jealousy. Half of witchcraft accusations between co-wives depend upon the presence of polygamy and upon the rate of plural marriages. Another difficulty associated with widowhood rests on the type of inheritance rules practiced within a community. Widowhood subjugation tends to be severe in communities in which inheritance is lateral, that is, a system whereby a brother or sister of the demised is expected to inherit the demised brother's properties before his sons. In a polygamous marriage, inheritance rules pitch co-wives against each other.

The persistence of degrading widowhood rite despite the process of change which has swept away other previously obnoxious practices is probably more puzzling than its existence in traditional times. The factors that are largely responsible for undesirable rites are illiteracy and survival of traditional burial rites in spite of conversion to the two dominant universal religions in Nigeria, Christianity and Islam. If funeral rites were practiced as stipulated in these two religions, obnoxious widowhood rites would have considerably been eliminated. Afibo (1989) proclaimed in one of the Better Life Programme Workshop that the churches are equally helpless in the face of the resurgence of traditional burial rites. As the cited author observed obituary notices indicate that family burial rites precede Christian ones.

Akande (1998), reports that in widowhood rites, women are much more subordinated as a proof of gender inequality in Nigeria. She stated that the widow is given a lot of punishment in the name of rites whereas the widower is granted comfort. She also revealed that in some parts of Nigeria, custom and tradition demands that a widower should not sleep alone but with another woman of his choice so that the spirit of his dead wife may not come and disturb him while he is sleeping peacefully. In Africa widowhood practices as required of widows make life unbearable for them irrespective of the fact that they are already in agony over the demise of

their beloved husbands; the prescriptions are to say the least, targeted at putting widows in chains. The execrating conditions these widows pass through in the name of custom is demeaning. Widows, during the period of mourning are treated like sub-human beings. Some widows take ill as a result of the terrible maltreatments they face. In some Nigerian indigenous societies, widows are forced to drink the water used for bathing the corpse of their deceased husbands to prove their innocence. Some are made to sleep with the deceased husband the night before his burial. This is meant to sever every tie between the living wife and her deceased husband. The only thing left is for the widow to be buried alive with the deceased husband.

Widows are not entitled to any rights. They get much of what may pass for right through their male children. In a situation where she has no male child, she is at the mercy of her husband's kinsmen thereby subjecting them to multiple handicaps. In some cultures widows are compelled to marry their late husband's relations irrespective of whether they like it or not. The combined effect of this maltreatment is that she is involuntarily precluded from taking part in certain social outings.

Irrespective of the influence of Western education and increasing urbanization, there are three interrelated features of Nigerian society that create condition that are conducive for the maltreatment of widows. First, is the continuing prominence of the extended family and by extension, the lineage. Be it in patrilateral setting or matrilineal ones, the adult Nigerian belongs first and foremost to him/her family orientation (more so, the extended family than the nuclear) to which he/she owes much allegiance. This tendency can be traced to the fact that the belief in the power of the ancestors to shape the features and wellbeing of the living with the male head or female head in the matrilineal group (Fadipe 1979). This implies that, what prevails is the idea of the lineage as stretching over time with the living being but a small segment of it such that it is considered important to maintain links between successive generations (both living and dead). This factor practically explains, for example, the Igbo customary prohibition of the wife from inheriting from a dead man's estate, (since she is not a member of the man's lineage. According to Akande (1996), one effect of this cultural phenomenon has been the persistent fostering of a very strong sense of belonging to the extended family and display of strong agnatic kinship

solidarity both of which, outweigh the sense of obligation to the family by procreation.

In patrilineal societies, a married man's psychic and material resources significantly flow and are expended to flow to his paternal family through parents and co-siblings while in matrilineal societies, the direction of the flow is from daughter to their mother's family. This is sociological prominence of the lineage almost always turns out unfavorable to woman (when widowed) even in matrilineal or double descent (bilateral) societies where women transmit but do not necessarily enjoy right to property. It may be expected that they will receive greater rights than in a matrilineal society. The main point is that whatever the descent systems, women lose out to men regarding inheritance of property. The point needs to be made that unlike the man, the rights of the average Nigerian woman regarding family property depends on whether a culture sees her as a child bearer or as a wife. Secondly, the main reason (and often the only reason) for contracting marriage in Nigeria remain procreation (Onah, 1992). This again can be traced historically to the fact that the human person's moral and spiritual obligation in pre-colonial Nigerian societies is to ensure lineage survival/continuity and continuation of the family name due to the very high morality level prevalent as at then. Thus it becomes necessary to have many children, so as to meet this obligation. The woman's role is seen first and foremost as that of a provider of children and a nurturer of children.

She is judged by how well she ensures that enough living sons survive in order to ensure the continuity of the husband's lineage. In fact, in some cultural areas, the last installment of the bride-wealth (an index of a union's legality and recognition) is paid or transferred only after the birth of the first child. It follows then that a woman who is not able to procreate is viewed as a failure and her husband is likely to respond by marrying a second wife or by divorcing her; hence the association of infertility with the persistence of polygamy and marital instability. One unintended consequence of this normative context is that the wife's social and economic contributions to her family or procreation are undervalued or completely ignored since her role is perceived strictly in terms of biological and social production of children. The third major socio-cultural factor which creates conditions conducive to a widow's maltreatment is the fact that marriage continues to be viewed and operates as a union between two

individuals. A clear indication of this among the Yoruba for example, is that custom demands that the wife addresses her husband relatives as "husbands" despite a trend towards free partner choice.

Fadipe (1970) maintains that although it is customary for the younger brother or eldest son on behalf of siblings of a man to inherit his property and his wives, the latter being considered as chattels, an allowance is made, in some Nigerian societies for a widow who did not wish to be inherited to free herself from the obligation by refunding the bride-wealth paid on her by her husband's family. On the other hand, this widowhood practice tends to make an already poor woman poorer due to the long periods of restrictions from engaging in economic activities. The reality remains, however, that the majority of Nigerian women do not have access to control over resources like financial and education that would make them less vulnerable to maltreatment and impoverishment should their husbands die. The socio-cultural conditions that make widowhood an unpleasant experience to many women in Nigeria is due to the structural disadvantage that women suffer from not having access to productive resources. This fact makes them dependent on men who benefit from the cultural conditions conducive to the maltreatment of widows.

METHODOLOGY

This study would concentrate on different widowhood practices/customs in Abiriba in Ohafia Local Government of Abia State. Major villages that constitute the clan would be selected as a case study. The target population of this study is all widows and anti-modernists in Abiriba. Widows were randomly selected from the various village units that make up Abiriba. The researcher used women meetings, unions, associations and churches as points of contact with the widows. The peculiar nature of this study pre-supposes the uses of the survey method. This method provides the researcher the opportunity to investigate the effects of modernization on widowhood practices in Abiriba. The instruments used in collecting data are the oral interview and the questionnaire containing items developed from the research question, purpose of study and the literature review. The oral interview constitutes a long narrative which is employed to support our findings from the questionnaires. The questionnaire is framed in the 'Yes/No' scale. The questionnaires were personally administered to 300 widows, randomly selected. A total of 240 questionnaires were successfully

retrieved. The researcher made use of the simple percentages in analyzing the data drawn. Other methods of data collection used in the course of this research are the oral interview which yields deeper and more reliable information. A major challenge to this research is the attitude of the respondents. Some of them were quite uncooperative because the issue of widowhood is quite a sensitive one. Such women found it difficult to divulge

information because it reminded them of the grief and pain they passed through.

Data Presentation and Analysis: The analysis of data collected made interesting relationship with reference to the stated hypothesis. However, it will be necessary to present the data of the respondents before analyzing the relationship between collected and data stated hypothesis.

Table 1. Age Distribution of Respondents.

| Age | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
|--------------|--------------------|------------|
| 21-35 | 45 | 19% |
| 36-55 | 65 | 27% |
| 55 and above | 130 | 54% |
| | 240 | 100% |

Source: Field Survey 2013

The above table shows that 19% respondents who passed through various widowhood rites in Abriba are within the age bracket of 21-35 years. 27% fall within the bracket of ages 36-55 while 54% are within the age

bracket of 55 and above. This reveals that the greater percentage of widows are elderly and by implication unable to engage in active economic activities so as to fend for themselves and members of their families.

Table 2: The Distribution of Widowhood in Socio-Economic Development in Abriba.

| Items | Observation | Percentage |
|--|-------------|------------|
| Received in socio-economic issues | 130 | 54.2 |
| Highly isolated in socio-economic issues | 75 | 31.3 |
| Not important in all socio-economic issues | 35 | 14.5 |
| Total | 240 | 100% |

Source: Field Survey 2013

The above distribution shows the placing of widows in the societal affairs. 130 respondents which represent 54.2% said that widows are well received and welcomed in the society. 75 which is 31.3% said that widows are highly isolated in the society, while 35 which is 14.5% said that widows are not important in the society. This

shows that the widows in Abriba are not fully isolated in the society.

Research Question 1: Is there a significant relationship between widowhood practices and the drift of marriageable female Abriba girls to other Igbo and non-Igbo ethnic groups?

Table 3. Widowhood and Migration of Marriageable Females in Abriba.

| Items | Observation | Percentage |
|-------|-------------|------------|
| Yes | 200 | 83.3 |
| No | 40 | 16.7 |
| Total | 240 | 100% |

Source: Survey Field Data 2013

From the survey, the 83.3 % of the widows say Yes to the question, while 16.7% said No, meaning that there is a significant relationship between the widowhood practices and the drift of marriageable females in Abriba to other Igbo and non-Igbo ethnic groups. Research Question 2: Is there any significant relationship between modernization and widowhood practices in Abriba? The table shows the level of modernization and widowhood in Abriba, 89.5% of

the respondents agitate for modernization of widowhood modernization of widowhood practices in Abriba While 10.5% of the total respondents said No to the question meaning that traditional widowhood practices are undergoing a process of social change in the area. The table shows the level of modernization and widowhood in Abriba, 89.5% of the respondents agitate for modernization of widowhood practices in Abriba. While 10.5% of the

total respondents said No to the question meaning that traditional widowhood practices are undergoing a process of social change in the area. Research

Question 3: Is there any significant relationship between widowhood practices and the socioeconomic development of Abriba.

Table 4. The Level of Modernization and Widowhood in Abriba.

| Items | Observation | Percentage |
|-------|-------------|------------|
| Yes | 215 | 89.5 |
| No | 25 | 10.5 |
| Total | 240 | 100% |

Source: Survey Field Data 2013

community?. Research Question 3: Is there any significant relationship between widowhood practices and the socioeconomic development of Abriba community?

respondents which gives 25.8% disagreed. This shows that there is a significant relationship between widowhood practice in Abriba and th socio-economic development of the town.

The data shows that 178 respondents which give 74.2% admit that widowhood practices in Abriba affects the socio-economic development of Abriba while 50

HYPOTHESIS I: There is no significant relationship between widowhood practices in Abriba and the poor living conditions of women there.

TABLE 5. Widowhood Practices and Socio-Economic Development of Abriba.

| Variables | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
|-----------|--------------------|------------|
| Yes | 178 | 74.2% |
| No | 62 | 25.8% |
| Total | 240 | 100% |

Source: Field Survey 2013

Table 6. Distribution of Respondents to Ascertain the Living Conditions of Widows in Abriba.

| Widowhood Rites | Percentage |
|---|------------|
| Staying indoors | 30.0% |
| Left with no possessions | 26.7 |
| Denied access to deceased husband’s properties | 24.3% |
| Children taken away | 7.5% |
| Marriage to deceased brother | 6.7% |
| Allowed access to deceased husband’s properties | 5.8% |
| Total | 100% |

Source: Field Survey 2013

The table above shows that the traditional rite of staying behind the door which gave 30.0% is common among the Abriba community followed by leaving widows with no possessions which gave us 26.7%; denial access to deceased husband’s properties is

24.3%; taking away the children 7.5%; marriage to deceased brother; allowed access to deceased husband’s properties. Another question was asked; how did you feel about the rite? The following are responds of the respondents.

Table 7. Distribution of respondents according to Emotional Reaction

| Rites | Good | Bad | Neutral acceptance |
|---|-------|-------|--------------------|
| Staying indoors | 8% | - | - |
| Left with no possessions | - | 45.3 | - |
| Denied access to deceased husband’s properties | - | 35.2 | - |
| Children taken away | 3% | - | - |
| Marriage to deceased brother | - | - | 4% |
| Allowed access to deceased husband’s properties | 4.5% | - | - |
| Total | 15.5% | 80.5% | 4% |

Source: Field Survey 2013

The above table shows that 80.5% of the women did not like the various rites. while 4% were neutral and 15.5% did not see anything wrong about it.

HYPOTHESIS II: There is no significant relationship between the level of education and the drift of marriageable Abriba females to other ethnic groups.

Table 8. Distribution of respondents according to the Level of education.

| Education | No | Percentage |
|-----------------|-----|------------|
| Illiterates | 5 | 2.0% |
| Standards six | 10 | 4.2% |
| WASC/Grade II | 25 | 10.4% |
| OND/NCE | 40 | 16.7% |
| HND and B.Sc. | 60 | 25.0% |
| M.Sc. and above | 100 | 41.7% |
| Total | 240 | 100% |

Source: field survey 2013

In the table, MSc. ranked 41.7% followed by HND/BSc is 25%, OND and NCE is 16.7% WASC/Grade II holders is 10.4% and Standard Six 4.2% and illiterates is 2.0% which shows that the illiterate marriageable females in Abriba adhere more to the tradition than the educated ones.

HYPOTHESIS III: There is no significant relationship between property ownership and the devaluation of women in Abriba

In probing the hypothesis, we asked whether the widow inherited the husband’s property after his demise. The table below shows the response.

Table of 9. Distribution of respondents according to women right to inherit husband’s property.

| Respondent | Yes | No |
|------------|------------|-------------|
| Widows | 40 (16.7%) | 200 (83.3%) |
| Total | 40 | 200 |

Source: Field Survey 2013

The above table shows that 200 widows acknowledge that they did not inherit their husbands’ properties because the Abriba culture do not allow them to inherit the properties of their deceased husbands, while 40 said that they did because such properties were either procured in the children’s/wives’ names or on the grounds that their late husbands did have any close relation to inherit his property. Another instance where a widow inherits her late husband’s property is based on the will made by the man when he was alive.

DISCUSSIONS

In attempt to proof the hypothesis right or wrong the following conclusion were drawn. Hypothesis I reveals

that the most of the widows do not like the traditional widowhood practices in Abriba. It is true that these punishments meted to the widows are based on sticking strongly to the tradition by the late husband’s relatives. In Abriba community this is usually the case when the woman is being accused of killing or having a hand in the death of her husband. In the data analysis of hypothesis II we discovered that the illiterate marriageable females in Abriba are more resistant to modernization and stick more to traditional widowhood practices more than those who are educated. The higher the level of the education the less support traditional practices in Abriba received. Hypothesis III shows that there is a positive relationship between female property ownership and the devaluation of women. The response from this hypothesis shows that a greater percentage of widows do not have access to their late husbands’ properties. This is purely based on Abriba tradition which does not give women the right to inherit property.

Challenges of Widows in Abriba: Women in Nigeria are continuously socialized into believing that their values are attached to men as fathers, husbands, sons, and brothers. They grow up in a culture that constantly undercut their self-worth through undervaluing their roles. Such cultures that dehumanize women are also seen in other parts of the world. The study reveals that one of the challenges widows face in Abriba is frustration. This is largely due to the absence of love and companionship a woman has been used to while the husband was alive. It is natural to lose a deceased loved one, it is important that the woman do not allow loneliness by shutting herself out of life. Close friends and love ones need to emotionally support her at this time of grief by offering their love and companionship as she needs genuine affection, through thoughtful acts and consideration. Often, these are offered at the early stage of her bereavement but really she must be comforted throughout her life time. Regrettably, in Abriba widows are traumatized by those who should offer them succour; relatives of their deceased husbands cart away the property left behind and the children. When these properties are removed the grief of the widow is heightened as she worries about replacing such properties, as well as, the acts of betrayal by trusted ones.

Financial incapacitation is yet another problem widow face, since many men are still their families’ bread winners and even where they are not they still bear

some financial burdens. The greater the economic dependence of widows on their spouses whilst they were alive, the more pressing their financial needs became. Where their husband have left some property, widows are advised to seek legal consultation early to ensure solid arrangements are made for the shelter and financial support of the widow and their children to avoid destitution. A third challenge is painful re-adjustment. Financial considerations and urbanization have affected the dependence/attachment to the extended family giving rise to situations where some men operate a strictly nuclear family setting. In such cases the deceased men while alive did not allow the extended family to interfere much into their immediate family affairs. Relatives often times blame the wives for separating them from their sons and brothers. Such wives could be 'punished' for their past 'acts'. A woman could be called names and even accused of being responsible for her husband's death. However, not all relatives have evil intensions towards the widow as widely speculated. Fourthly, there are lots of widows who blame themselves over things they should not have done while their husbands were yet alive. They felt that those things could have helped to strengthen the life of their demised husbands.

Fear of death is another challenge a widow faces in Abriba. Naturally, the widow has the fear that death may strike her too. They have the fear of coping without the deceased and also fear of the future of their children. There is, therefore, the need for every woman to empower herself economically and professionally in a skill or trade, so that when the husband dies, she will not be tensed up. In the same way, many widows especially those with young children fear that they may not be able to properly raise up the children to the standards they should.

SUMMARY

The research is a study on modernization and widowhood practices in Abriba, Ohafia Local Government Area of Abia State. Questions were posed to address the major objectives of the study and the analysis of the research questions were done using percentage method. From the analysis, it was agreed that widows in Abriba has right of inheritance to their late husband's wealth but the widows are not able to exercise this right because of obnoxious cultural customs associated with traditional widowhood practices in Abriba. The analysis also shows that there is

a significant difference between the modern Abriba societies and the traditional setting of Abriba. Presently most Abriba marrigable girls marry outside their community due to the obnoxious widowhood practices in the area. The analysis also shows that there is no conscious effort by individuals, organization and government/non-governmental organizations (NGOs) towards correcting or protecting the rights of widows in Abriba. The analysis also proved that widows are welcomed in the societal affairs. Finally, from the analysis of the questionnaire; it is believed that widows are denied of their rights especially of inheritance and succession and therefore they are forced to be inherited by the brothers and relations of their late husband as their properties. They are dehumanized, maltreated, deprived and subjecting them and their children to perpetual hardship and difficulty.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher finally, in this study makes the following recommendations to fight, eliminate and improve the condition and recognition of the rights of widows as every other free human being in Abriba.

1. Government at all levels should be alerted over plight of widows and should enact legislations to protect them and their children.
2. Women should be well advised to ensure that properties that their husbands acquire are in the women's personal names or those of their children.
3. It is desirable to strengthen widow's organization, make them more vocal and also encourage individual widows to exhaust all legal procedures when necessary.
4. Women who are usually used against their fellow women in times of bereavement should be educated.
5. There should be a well-designed widowhood network organization that should be responsible for the welfare of widows.
6. Priorities should be given to widows in the provision of job opportunities by government.
7. An association and a trust fund for widows should be established.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed the influence of modernization on widowhood practices in Abriba, Ohafia Local Government Area of Abia State and posits that most contemporary Abriba women encourage their husbands to procure properties in their children's names, this is to ensure that such properties are rightly inherited by the

man's children and such being used for their up keep. Secondly most contemporary Abriba girls marry outside their ethnic group. This has led to a mass transfer of development from the local community to other communities other than their own. It is also an indication of brain drain in Abriba. In order to curb these and other challenges, it is pertinent to state that Abriba people should abolish traditional widowhood practices that infringe upon the fundamental human right of Abriba women to inherit their late husbands' properties. A woman should not be deprived of any of her legal rights as mentioned, by the mere fact that she has become a widow. Being a widow is not a legal liability and no one can carelessly impose any such liability on a widow. A widow is still a human being therefore retains all her legal rights and is fully entitled to enjoy them. Without any curtailments or invasion of any of the legal rights of a woman who lost her husband. It may amount to criminal offence of administering noxious or harmful substance to a person. To force a widow out of her matrimonial home is a violation of her constitutional right to private and family life provided for in section 34 of the constitution. It is also in a criminal code. It is also the false imprisonment in civil law. To force a widow to do what is not right is denying her of her fundamental right to freedom of movement guaranteed by Section 38 of the Constitution human and people's rights.

The study will help the Abriba to understand that the drift of marriageable Abriba girls as a result of the fear of the inhuman widowhood practices there has gross adverse effects on the political, social and economic development of the community. A proper understanding of this would result in the abolition of all inhuman practices associated with widowhood in Abriba. This eventually would lead to the reduction of the level of gender inequality in Abriba and promote women's rights there. The Abriba Elders in Council would find this study very useful in their efforts to curb the decrease of females in the labour force in that tribe; so also would the Abia State Government, people and students who wish to have an insight into the complexity of Abriba socio-economic and cultural structures.

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