

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
INNOVATIVE RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE**

ISSN-2213-1356

www.ijirk.com

**COUNSELLING NEEDS OF WIDOWS FOR COPING
WITH WIDOWHOOD PRACTICES IN BENUE
STATE OF NIGERIA**

**EGBO ANTHONIA CHINONYELUM PhD; EGBO, CHINONYE EMMANUELLA
& OGENYI ANDREW**

DEPARTMENT OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING, FACULTY OF EDUCATION,
ENUGU STATE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, (ESUT),
ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

Abstract

This present study examined the counselling needs of widows for coping with widowhood practices in Benue State, Nigeria. This study used a sample size of three hundred and eighty-four (384) respondents, comprising of widows from the 23 LGA of Benue State, Nigeria. The researcher adopted descriptive survey research design such that a portion of a bigger population was sampled for study and the findings generalized to the entire population. This study identified some counselling needs of widows in Benue State of Nigeria. The counselling need of widows as identified in this study ranges from religious, emotional, and vocational counselling needs. This study identified that widows need counselling in these regard to enable them cope with widowhood practices in Benue State, Nigeria. The study concluded by recommending that counsellors should be trained and empowered to provide counseling to widows in the areas so examined by this study; religious, psychological, vocational.

Keywords: *Counselling, Needs, Widows, Coping, Widowhood, Practices*

Introduction

Recently, Nigerians have seen the need for counselling services as a panacea for varieties of developmental tasks. Okeke (2008) sees it as a dynamic instrument for changes and a tool for national growth and development. Counsellors through counselling have empowered diverse individuals, families and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education and career goals, especially widowed women who suffer from varying emotional and psychological stress, resulting from bad widowhood practices. Widowhood is a sordid situation that befalls women after the death of their husband. In most cases, rituals associated with this widowhood have lots of serious implications on the health and general wellbeing of these widows.

In Nigeria, just like other patriarchal societies, women are regarded more as appendages to their husbands. In some cases, women lack the right to ownership of property like land and they face lots of inhuman traditional practices harmful to their health, such as female genital mutilation and widowhood rituals which both old and young widows are compelled to undergo as part of mourning their dead husbands, (Oke, 2010). Mourning and burial rituals are inherently left for women to suffer whenever a man dies. This situation presents a traumatic, painful, and regrettable experience all over the world, but worse in developing countries including Nigeria, where there are lots of these obnoxious practices and rituals (Afonja, 2009).

A widow in the Nigerian context refers to any female, married under native law and custom or under the marriage Act or any other law recognized in Nigeria whose husband has died, and has not remarried (Amposah, 2015). A widow refers to a woman whose husband has died and who has not remarried, while widowhood is the state or period of being a widow or a widower (Fadipe, 2011). Widowhood rites, as practiced in many traditional African societies, are the practices that accompany the mourning of the loss of one's spouse. The period of mourning is coupled with a series of life events which often have wide-ranging implications. Some of these practices are variously described as barbaric, atrocious, backwards, immoral, commoditization and an abusive violation of the sexual and human rights of powerless" (Smith, 2008). In Benue State of Nigeria, for instance, a typical widow is by tradition expected to undergo these serious mourning rites and widowhood practices which is an enduring period of deep rooted agony, seclusion and exclusion, anxiety, deprivation, restitution, trauma, insecurity and pain, all these have lots of social and health implication to the widow (Akujobi, 2009). As a result of bad widowhood practices prevalent in most Nigerian communities, widows are faced with lots of counselling needs to enable them cope with these obnoxious widowhood practices in their regions. Study by Fadipe (2011) revealed that widows were forced to ritually shaved off their hair on pubic region and head, forced to swear to prove their innocence, restricted from going certain places during the mourning period, abandoned and not taken care of by their husband's relatives, starved of good food during their mourning period, forced to marry any of their husband's relations against their wish, sexually abused by their husband's relatives, forced out of their matrimonial homes by in-laws, and they were dispossessed of their husband's property. Sometimes forced to drink water used in bathing their dead husband.

Counselling needs simply refers to those knowledge areas that will help them actualize their positive economical, religious, educational, vocational and other personal social dreams in their new situation of life as widows. According to Abe (2008), some of the counselling needs of widows include; how to effectively get along with family members of her dead husband, how to manage psychological and emotional problems associated with widowhood, how to reduce anxiety associated with widowhood, how to gain more self-confidence, manage her finances and carry on with life as a widow, how to stop feeling sad or depressed, how to manage stress and deal with anger.

This present study is interested in religious, emotional and vocational counselling as counseling needs for widows. Religious counseling is a form counseling that is of interest to the researcher. Widows have the need for religious counseling especially as most of the dehumanizing practices they face are rooted in culture/religion. According to Oke (2010), religious counseling is a therapy focus area centering on intertwining the disciplines of religion and psychology to provide an approach to mental and emotional health that pulls from religious teachings. Practitioners of this style of counseling incorporate religious scripture and teachings to guide their clients through challenging life issues. When faced turbulent life events, integrating and strengthening one's religious faith may be the missing piece in finding proper treatment. A Religious counsellor can help you to navigate life's challenges in ways that respect ones faith.

Emotional counselling simply refers to therapy/treatments that can improve one's mental wellness. These treatments can help people who are experiencing emotional or behavior problems. Also, it can help people who have a mental health disorder. Emotional counselling is often times referred to as psychotherapy. Many times, Emotional counselling is used in combination with prescription medicine for mental health disorder. Therapy will usually improve the results you get from the medicine (Aboki, 2009).

Vocational counselling assesses an individual's intelligence, aptitude, interests, abilities and skill levels in order to create and follow a career path. Vocational therapists partner with businesses, government agencies, educational institutions and the employment industry to develop mutually beneficial opportunities for individuals with special needs. They also assist in assessing, training and developing individuals for positions and advancement. Widows need counseling in order to enable them get relevant information on how to make the right choice of vocation for their kids. In some societies, the death of a husband makes the wife lose some of her pride and privileges. In some cultures, she becomes an object of maltreatment. The widow's status traditionally changes from womanhood to widowhood. The pathetic state of widows is often worsened by some obnoxious cultural expectations, norms and deprivations. The physical and psychological violence inflicted on widows as part of the traditional burial rituals of cleansing have lots of implications on the health and welfare of the widow who is most times traumatized and battered. The children too, who themselves have become less protected share in their mother's pain, especially if they are still young. This study seeks to examine the counseling needs of widows for coping with widowhood practices in Benue State.

Purpose of the Study

Specifically, the study sought:

- i. To identify the religious counseling needs of widows for coping with widowhood practices in Benue State, Nigeria.
- ii. To identify the emotional counselling needs of widows for coping with widowhood practices in Benue State, Nigeria.
- iii. To identify the vocational counselling needs of widows for coping with widowhood practices in Benue State, Nigeria.

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. What are the religious counselling needs of widows for coping with widowhood practices in Benue State, Nigeria?
- ii. What are the emotional counselling needs of widows for coping with widowhood practices in Benue State, Nigeria?
- iii. What are the vocational counselling needs of widows for coping with widowhood practices in Benue State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

All the formulated hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significant using the t test analysis.

Ho₁: There is no significant mean difference between the religious counseling needs of widows residing in rural areas and those in urban areas of Benue State, Nigeria.

Ho₂: There is no significant mean difference between the emotional counseling needs of widows residing in rural areas and those in urban areas of Benue State, Nigeria.

Methodology

The researcher adopted a descriptive survey research design for this study. According to Nwadinobi (2014), survey research design is one in which a group of people or items considered to be a representative of the entire group is studied. The findings of such a survey research can be generalized to the whole group. This study was carried out in Benue State of Nigeria. Benue State is one of the Middle Belt states in Nigeria with a population of about 4,253,641 in 2006 census. Based on the latest estimates of the Nigerian bureau of Statistics (NBS) for the year 2018, Benue State is currently estimated to have a population of about six (6) million. The population for the study consists of widows in Benue State, the estimated population of widows in the 23 LGAs of Benue State is 210,000 (Benue State Ministry of Women Affairs, 2019). A sample of 384 widows was selected for this study through proportional stratified random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection is a self-structured questionnaire developed by the researcher and validated by three experts, one in measurement and evaluation and two in Department of Guidance and Counselling. It was called counselling needs of widows for coping with widowhood practices Questionnaire (CNWCWPQ). The instrument has two sections. Namely; section A and B section. Section A contains the Bio-data of the respondents while section B contains the questionnaire for this research work. The Cronbach's alpha analysis conducted yielded a coefficient of 0.89 which the researcher considered appropriate for the study. The instrument was administered directly to the 384 respondents using twelve trained research assistants. On the whole, a total of three hundred and eighty four (384) copies of the questionnaires were correctly filled and retrieved from the respondents, giving a return rate of 100%. The responses of the respondents were analyzed using the mean, grand mean and standard deviation. The mean rating of the numerical values assigned to the options will be summed up and the cut off will be determined by adding the sum of the nominal rating values and dividing same by the number of rated items. Thus,

$$\frac{4+3+2+1}{4} = \frac{10}{4} = 2.50$$

The basis for decision would therefore be 2.50. A mean score of 2.50 above will be regarded as positive perception while a mean score below 2.50 will be interpreted as negative perception. Using the t-test statistical analysis, the research hypotheses will be tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Results of Question 1 are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Mean perception Scores (X) and Standard Deviation of Religious counselling needs of widows for coping with widowhood practices in Benue State

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE:								
What are the religious counselling needs of widows for coping with widowhood practices in Benue State, Nigeria?								
S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM(S)	RESPONSES				Summation	Mean	DECISION
		SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)			
1	Widows need counseling on how to effectively reason or do things on their own, especially when it pertains to religious decisions.	150	106	95	33	384	2.97	POSITIVE
		600	318	190	33	1141		
2	Traditional grief counseling is an alternative therapy which helps the bereaved to re-integrate, withdraw and assimilate the reality of bereavement through the painful process of adjustment.	170	155	44	15	384	3.25	POSITIVE
		680	465	88	15	1248		
3	There is the wide-spread belief in African societies including Nigeria that without all these widowhood rites and practices, the spirit of the dead husband will not have rest, instead his soul will be wandering around and in some cases the dead man's spirit will be destroying things and hurting people in the community. So, the wife has to go through all these widowhood practices to appease the dead and widows need counseling in this regards to effectively manage this situation.	291	35	24	34	384	3.52	POSITIVE
		1164	105	48	34	1351		
4	Widows need counseling to effectively manage obnoxious traditional widowhood practices such as shaving the pubic hairs with broken bottle and /or shaving the hair on their head with razor blade.	120	196	9	59	384	2.86	POSITIVE
		480	588	18	11	1097		

5	Guiding and assisting completely baffled widows to make confident choices between alternative choices is a counseling need of widows.	159	161	46	18	384	3.20	POSITIVE
		636	483	92	18	1229		
6	Widows need guidance and counseling to transform societal structures and as well be able to demonstrate a quest for justice and demand same individually and collectively.	226	80	20	58	384	3.23	POSITIVE
		904	240	40	58	1242		
7	Widows need counseling on how to provide moral guidance to their kids and not to be feeling that their children’s moral upbringing is at stake now that their father is gone.	350	30	4	0	384	3.90	POSITIVE
		1400	90	8	0	1498		
Grand Mean							3.15	
Standard Deviation							0.2964	

From table 1, religious counselling needs for widows yielded a grand mean of 3.15, an indication that widows need religious counseling in order to enable them cope with widowhood practices in Benue State, Nigeria.

A standard deviation of 0.2964 shows that the respondents did not differ in their responses regarding the religious counselling needs of widows in Benue State, Nigeria.

Table 2: Mean perception Scores (X) and Standard Deviation of Emotional counselling needs of widows for coping with widowhood practices in Benue State

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO:								
What are the emotional counseling needs of widows for coping with widowhood practices in Benue State, Nigeria?								
S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM(S)	RESPONSES				Summation	Mean	DECISION
		SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)			
8	Widows undergo storms of economic deprivations, distress, dehumanizing treatments, physiological and mental torture and will need counseling in this regards?	215	144	20	5	384	3.48	POSITIVE
		860	432	40	5	1337		

9	Widows need counseling to enable them advance in self-discovery and properly and maximize available opportunities.	190	132	45	17	384	3.29	POSITIVE
		760	396	90	17	1263		
10	Widows need guidance on how to effectively express their views freely and politely, especially when faced by antagonistic situations as a result of their widowhood.	270	108	5	1	384	3.68	POSITIVE
		1080	324	10	1	1415		
11	Widows need counseling to effectively control their temperaments and emotions and to effectively employ legitimate means to address infringements to their right.	75	289	15	5	384	3.13	POSITIVE
		300	867	30	5	1202		
12	Widows need a form of counseling that will enable them assess themselves properly to know their areas of strengths and weakness in the face of various challenges.	160	209	10	5	384	3.36	POSITIVE
		640	627	20	5	1292		

Research Question 2 (Table 2) Continued

13	Widows need counseling to enable them form positive concepts about themselves.	324	35	20	5	384	3.77	POSITIVE
		1296	105	40	5	1446		
14	Widows need counseling to effectively adjustment in their behaviours positively and increase self-confidence.	164	110	57	53	384	3.00	POSITIVE
		656	330	114	53	1153		

15	Widows need counseling and guidance on how to develop healthy personalities.	154	110	21	99	384	2.83	POSITIVE
		616	330	42	99	1087		
16	Widows need counseling on how to maintain cordial relationship with her husband's family in order to reduce stress that is usually associated with large family sizes and curtail chances of maltreatment and pressure from husband relatives.	252	91	36	5	384	3.54	POSITIVE
		1008	273	72	5	1358		

Research Question 2 (Table 2) Continued

17	Widows need counseling on how to maintain cordial relationship with her children in order to curtail the influence of peer pressure, etc.	260	90	10	24	384	3.53	POSITIVE
		1040	270	20	24	1354		
18	Widows should be counseled to be conscious of their fundamental human rights and at times seek to use available civil society institutions; especially, the non-governmental organizations to protect and defend their rights against all forms of infringements.	250	120	14	0	384	3.61	POSITIVE
		1000	360	28	0	1388		

19	Widows need counseling on how to associate themselves to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) or similar bodies such as federation of women lawyers who can sensitize them to know their fundamental human rights against any dehumanizing practices of widowhood.	190	85	89	20	384	3.16	POSITIVE
		760	255	178	20	1213		
Grand Mean							3.40	
Standard Deviation							0.2401	

Research questions 2 has a grand mean of 3.40, affirming that widows need emotional counseling to enable them manage their emotions and cope with the demands of widowhood in Benue State, Nigeria. A standard deviation of 0.2401 simply indicates that the respondents did not differ in their opinion about the emotional counseling needs of widows in Benue State, Nigeria.

Table 3: Mean perception Scores (X) and Standard Deviation of Vocational counselling needs of widows for coping with widowhood practices in Benue State

RESEARCH QUESTION THREE:								
What are the vocational counseling needs of widows for coping with widowhood practices in Benue State, Nigeria?								
S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM(S)	RESPONSES				Summation	Mean	DECISION
		SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)			
20	Widows need counseling on how to identify the local trades in their area and how to use them for their advantage.	178	200	5	1	384	3.45	POSITIVE
		712	600	10	1	1323		
21	Widows need counseling to make occupational choices that will serve their interest and place them on advantage positions.	50	300	31	3	384	3.03	POSITIVE
		200	900	62	3	1165		
22	Widows need counseling to enable them develop career/job-hunting skills	348	33	2	1	384	3.90	POSITIVE
		1392	99	4	1	1496		

23	Widows need counseling in the areas of business and career development in order to enable them Know about existing business opportunities around them and how to maximize them to their advantage.	193	135	40	16	384	3.32	POSITIVE
		772	405	80	16	1273		

24	Widows need vocational counseling in order to make the right career choices.	232	150	0	2	384	3.59	POSITIVE
		928	450	0	2	1380		
25	Widows need counseling to enable them cope with anxiety and to effectively manage vocational issues.	172	180	29	3	384	3.36	POSITIVE
		688	540	58	3	1289		
26	Widows need counseling to develop effective habits for personal growth.	141	187	53	3	384	3.21	POSITIVE
		564	561	106	3	1234		

27	Widows need counseling in order to enable them get relevant information on how to make the right choice of vocation for their kids.	238	93	40	13	384	3.45	POSITIVE
		952	279	80	13	1324		
28	Widows need counseling on how to take the necessary steps towards remarrying or handling other related actions.	248	130	6	0	384	3.63	POSITIVE
		992	390	12	0	1394		
Grand Mean							3.24	
Standard Deviation							0.2909	

A grand mean of 3.24 for research question 3 simply affirms the views of majority of the respondents, that all the items so listed in table 4.3 are vocational counselling needs of widows for coping with widowhood practices in Benue State, Nigeria. A standard deviation of 0.2909 for research question 3 is considerably low, indicating that the respondents did not differ in their views about the vocational counselling needs of widows for coping with widowhood practices in Benue State, Nigeria.

Test of hypotheses

Null hypothesis 1

Ho₁: There is no significant mean difference between the religious counseling needs of widows residing in rural areas and those in urban areas of Benue State, Nigeria.

Table 4.6: Test results for hypothesis 1

Gender	Mean (X)	SD	t- Computed	t-tabulated	Decision
Urban	1.75	0.75	0.93	1.96	H ₀ Accepted
Rural	1.97	0.88			

Since the t-calculated is less than t-tabulated in table 4.6, we thus accept H₀.

Null hypothesis 2

Ho₂: There is no significant mean difference between the emotional counseling needs of widows residing in rural areas and those in urban areas of Benue State, Nigeria.

Table 4.7: Test results for hypothesis 2

Gender	Mean (X)	SD	t- Computed	t-tabulated	Decision
Urban	1.95	0.34	0.85	1.96	H ₀ Accepted
Rural	1.77	0.78			

Since the t-calculated is less than t-tabulated in table 4.7, we thus accept H₀.

Discussion

In research question one, a grand mean of 3.15 indicates that all the respondents generally believes that widows need religious counselling in order to enable them cope with religious widowhood practices in Benue State, Nigeria and that all the items so mentioned in table 4.1 are religious counseling needs of widows. A standard deviation of 0.2964 is considerably low which shows that the respondents did not differ in their responses regarding the religious counseling needs of widows in Benue State, Nigeria.

This finding is in line with the findings of Oke (2010), which noted that widows are subjected to various dehumanizing practices just to establish innocence or appease the dead husband. A grand mean of 3.40, with a standard deviation of 0.2401 was obtained for all the items (items 10 -21) in research question two. A grand mean of 3.60 affirms that widows need emotional counselling to enable them manage their emotions and cope with the demands of widowhood in Benue State, Nigeria. A standard deviation of 0.2401 simply indicates that the respondents did not differ in their opinion about the emotional counseling needs of widows in Benue State, Nigeria.

This finding is in line with the findings of Lasebikan (2011:19) which captured the situation of widowhood in her statement: “widows’ experience during widowhood is better imagined than experienced. A grand mean of 3.30, with a standard deviation of 0.41 was obtained for all the items (items 22 -30) in research question three. A grand mean of 3.24 for research question 3 simply affirms the views of majority of the respondents, that all the items so listed in table 4.3 are vocational counseling needs of widows for coping with widowhood practices in Benue State, Nigeria. A standard deviation of 0.2909 for research question 3 is considerably low, indicating that the respondents did not differ in their views about the vocational counseling needs of widows for coping with widowhood practices in Benue State, Nigeria.

This finding is in line with the findings of Oke (2010) where he noted that widows are subjected to long period of mourning and consequent loss of income renders them economically and vocationally incapacitated unlike their male counterparts and this, definitely calls for vocational counseling for of widows to enable them cope with widowhood practices, especially in Benue State, Nigeria.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, this study has identified some counselling needs of widows in Benue State of Nigeria. The counselling need of widows identified in this study range from religious, emotional, and vocational counselling needs.

Recommendations

1. The Government should make stiffer policies/reforms to support the elimination of all forms of gender violence including the torture of widows by some cultures.
2. Non-governmental organizations should be empowered to create enough sensitization to ensure that no widow shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman degrading treatment.
3. More counsellors should be trained and empowered to provide counseling to widows in the areas so examined by this study; religious, psychological, vocational, economic and educational.

REFERENCES

- Abe, G. O. (2008). “Ethics and African Societies: The Perspectives of African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam” in Abe G. O. (ed.) African Journal of Biblical Studies Vol. 8 No1. Ilorin: Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies (NABIS).
- Aboki, Y. (2009). “Property Rights of the Customary and Islamic Law Spouse in Divorce Issues Problems and Proposal for Reform” Rights of Children and Women in Divorce by Olonade, A. and Ipaye, T., (Lagos: Franchard Publisher for Fredrick Foundation).
- Afonja, S. (2009), “Current Explanations of Sexual Inequality: Reconsideration” Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies, Vol.21, No.2, p. 22-30.

- Akujobi, R. (2009) Culture, Media, Technology and Psycho-social Development in Nigeria. Book of Readings Alaba, S. & Akinsola, E. F. Lagos, Interlingua Nigeria Limited.
- Amposah, K. (2015). Topics on West Africa Traditional Religious Studies Vol.11 Cape Coast: Mfantsiman Press Ltd.
- Fadipe N. A. (2011). The Sociology of the Yoruba, Ibadan Ibadan University Press.
- Nwadinobi, E. A. (2014). "Widowhood in Nigeria: The Case of Four Eastern States," in Owasanoye, B. and Ahonsi, B. A., (eds.) Widowhood in Nigeria: Issues, Problems and Prospect, Lagos, Friedrich Ebert Foundation and Human Development Initiatives.
- Oke, E. A. (2010). Introduction to Social Anthropology Macmillian, Agbo Areo Publishers Ibadan.
- Okeke, P. (2008). 'Reconfiguring Traditional Women's Rights and Social Status in Contemporary Nigeria' Africa Today, Winter, Bloomington.
- Smith, I.O. (2008). The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Annotated Ecowatch publications.