

Gender Based Sexual Violence among Nigerian Widows: Implication for HIV Transmission

Akanle Florence Foluso

Institute of Education, Faculty of Education, University of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

Abstract: The women folks in Nigeria are generally vulnerable to male-perpetrated violence. Apart from political marginalization, Nigerian women are victims of sexual and cultural violence. Widows in Nigeria are subjected to varied harmful traditional practices and sexual abuses. The study attempts to examine the varied sexual and cultural abuses widows experience in Nigeria. The study also investigates the implications of these abuses for HIV/AIDS pandemic for the widows. In addressing these concerns the study utilized a field surveyed questionnaire to elicit primary data from 510 randomly selected women widows. The findings revealed that widows in Nigeria are subjected to harmful traditional practices and sexual abuses. Based on the findings it was recommended that the issue of sexual abuse of widows should not be overlooked if HIV/AIDS prevention is to be effective and that preventing sexual violence and HIV/AIDS will necessitate a cultural shift in terms of gender-role expectation in Nigeria.

Key words: Cultural shift, gender-based violence, HIV/AIDS, sexual violence, widows

INTRODUCTION

A widow refers to a woman whose husband has died and who has not married again, while widowhood is the state or period of being a widow or a widower. One would have thought that the pains of losing a husband or a bread winner and the head of a family should be enough pain to a woman, and as such one would expect no more additional pain for someone who has been bereaved. However, this is not the case of widowhood in Nigeria. The womenfolk in Nigeria are subjected to varied harmful traditional practices and sexual abuses. The term violence against women means any act of gender based violence that results in or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women including such acts of coercion arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. This encompasses but is not limited to physical, sexual, psychological violence occurring in the family, traditional practices harmful to women and violence related to exploitation (Watts and Zimmerman, 2002).

Non-discrimination on grounds of sex is a norm of international law, and therefore binding on all states even those that have not ratified the relevant conventions. Gender based violence is a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedom on the basis of equality with men. (IPPF, 2008) Widowhood practices are practices which are only limited to women, men do not mourn their wives in the same manner hence this practice which rooted in superstition is a discrimination against women which rooted in superstition. Ede (2007) reported these traditions are not

observed purposely to oppress and intimidate women, but to ensure an honourable place in the hereafter, and guarantee for the widows and the living, respect among the in-laws and lots of blessing from the ancestor. These reasons are however, grossly inadequate in the light of prevailing realities.

The ECPAT (2007) noted that the observance of traditional, cultural or religious practices in Africa mirrors a community's values; what they accept as true or real, what they believe; and their religious practices. Some of these practices, which are sometimes passed from generation to generation, can undermine an Africa Community's sense of unity. However, harmful traditional practices such as widowhood inheritance are common in most West African countries. Some cultural sexual practices put some Nigerian widows at risk of HIV. In some areas in Nigeria. Ede (2007) reported that widowhood practices are still prevalent. Widowhood practices in Nigeria, is especially harmful and constitute a form of sexual exploitation and gender based violence. Widowhood practices depicts gender inequality and power imbalance between male and female. Ede (2007) reported that widowhood practices are truly cruel and inhuman. As reported by Ede (2007), women experience socio-psychological trauma, are subjected to harmful health practices, economic exertion and deprivations. Women are subjected to rough treatment by close relatives of the late husband. Women are shorn of property, or inheritance right and also subjected to other harmful cultural or customary practices damaging to women such as rape by husbands relatives (IPPF, 2008).

All persons have right to life, liberty and to be free of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment in all

cases and particularly on account of any prohibited grounds of discrimination and shall have right to exercise their sexuality free of violence or coercion. All persons have the right to be free from violence, rape and other forms of physical, verbal, psychological or economic abuse, sexual harassment or sexual violence, rape within or outside marriage (IPPF, 2008).

Many international norms and standard recognize important principle relating to sexuality, sexual right, which protects particularly identities. This application is of particular importance to the poor, the marginalized, the socially excluded whether such characteristics are historical or recent.

Some of the factors which hinder HIV risk behaviour reduction and the actualization of change in sexual behaviour which is needed in the growth in HIV prevention in Nigeria have to be identified. Among the factors are cultural ideologies that deny the known methods of transmission in order to maintain cultural practices. Others are subjugation and subordination of women in the country which limits their ability to decide when, how and whom they have sex. Socio-cultural barrier to proven preventive methods of HIV prevention is also a factor.

In order to promote and protect the basic rights of widows and safeguard them from abuse, exploitation and HIV/AIDS, there is need for this study.

The third of the Millennium Development goal promotes gender equality and empowering of women and seek to eliminate gender disparity in sexuality. Despite this objectives set by Government, gender inequality, gender violence against women continue to exist in Nigeria.

In many African Countries, the right to be free from harmful traditional practices, forced marriage, violence including physical, verbal, psychological or economic abuse, sexual harassment or sexual violence continues to elude Nigerian widows. Widows are at high risk of sexual abuse; they are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment and sexual violence from men and boys who are associated or related to their late husbands, ECPAT (2007).

The magnitude of the problem however needs significant preventive efforts starting with a basic understanding of the varied sexual and cultural abuses widows experience in Nigeria. There is also a need to understand the implication of these abuses for HIV/AIDS pandemic for widows.

To be able to conduct the research, some general questions were raised:

- Do widows experience discriminatory attitude from men in Nigeria
- Are Nigerian widows subjected to untold hardship, deprivation and undue restriction in Nigeria?

- To what extent are widows treated worse than other women in Nigeria?
- What are the varied sexual and cultural abuses widows experience in Nigeria

Hypotheses:

- There is no significant difference in the experience of widows of different levels of education
- Widows from different Religion would not experience a significant difference in the experience
- There is no significant difference in the experience of widows of different age groups
- Experience of widows in the different State would not be significantly different

Purpose of the study: The study was designed to investigate the varied sexual and cultural abuses widows experience in Nigeria. The study also examined the implication of these abuses for HIV/AIDS pandemic for widows.

METHODOLOGY

Research design: The study utilized a descriptive field survey design. The design is considered appropriate because it focuses on the observation and the perception of an existing situation, describe and interprets what is concerned with issue; conditions and practices and relationship, views, belief, attitudes, process and trends which are developing concerning the issue of violence against women widows in Nigeria. The plan of the study involves the use of questionnaire to collect data in order to test hypotheses and answer research questions.

Population: The study was conducted in Nigeria in 2007. The target population of the study consisted of all widows in Nigeria. Nigeria consists of six zones namely South-West, South-East, South-South, North-West, North-East and North-Central. There are 36 States in Nigeria; these States differ from one another in terms of language, religions, geographical size but have similar culture. Each zone apart from North-West which consists of 7 States and North-Central with FCT making the 6th State has 6 States.

Sample and sampling techniques: The sample consisted of 510 widows aged 20-60 and selected from three different zones of Nigeria. The sampling procedure was a combination of stratified and simple random sampling techniques. The sampling aims at selecting eligible persons with equal probability, samples were selected from South-West, South-South and North Central Zones.

Two States from each zone were selected. From South-West, Ondo and Ekiti States were selected. From North-Central, Kogi and Kwara States were selected.

From South-South, Rivers and Edo States were selected in all.

Stratified Sampling Technique was used using, States, Religion, Age and Level of Education as strata. Selection was made in two towns in each State. After stratification, simple random sampling technique was used because a representation of defined groups in the population was guaranteed.

Research instrument: A research instrument named Gender and Widowhood Questionnaire (GWQ) was used. It consists of two sections. Section one consists of background characteristics of respondents while section two consists of 42 items that could measure the varied sexual, cultural psychological and psychological abuses of widows in Nigeria. Some of the questions asked include:

- Are widowhood practices still practiced in Nigeria?
- Do widows experience discriminatory attitude from men?
- Do widows experience sexual, cultural abuses?
- Do widows experience psychological trauma?

The questionnaire also sought the view of the widows concerning their experience of the varied cultural abuses; whether it is true or false. Some of the sexual abuse questions sought to find from the widows are if someone has talked to them about sex in a manner that made them uncomfortable; someone forcing them to have sex from their husbands' family. Have someone tried to force you to have sex in your husbands' family? Has you been denied of power to dictate safe sex because they are women? Have you experienced ritual sexual intercourse? Have they been refused a favour by a husband's relative for refusing sex? The questionnaire also sought the extent of discriminative treatment of widows.

The section on varied cultural and sexual abuses was coded Yes or No or True or False. Some others where a likert scale form which coded the answers to the extent of discriminatory treatment as (a) a great deal (b) some (c) a little (d) not at all. (a = 4) (b = 3) (c = 2) (d = 1).

- a A great deal = 4
- b Some = 3
- c A little = 2
- d Not at all = 1

The respondents were encouraged to reflect the genuine experience and extent of sexual, cultural, psychological and physical abuse they have experienced.

Validity of instrument: In validating the instrument, face and construct methods were used. 50 items were

constructed, these items were presented to specialist in psychology and gender related area of study and those in Test and Measurements. The face validity of the instrument was measured. The experts confirmed that the items contain items that could elicit the intended response on the varied gender, sexual, and cultural abuse experienced by women. Also, the experts reviewed the items in terms of clarity and ensured all that could confuse respondents and research assistants were removed. The construct validity was ensured by correlating the score of test administration of the instrument with that of another one with high level of construct using Pearson Product Movement Correlation. A correlation of the test scores of the two instruments on the 40 women widows gave a correlation coefficient of 0.74. This was significant at $p < 0.05$. This indicated that (GWQ) clearly measures appropriately the same construct with the other instrument. Hence, GWQ is seen as a valid measure of construct in question. Only widows in Oyo State who would not constitute part of the final study were used in the construct validity.

Reliability of the instrument: To determine the internal consistency of the instrument a single test was given at a single sitting. The odd numbers in the test come from one alternate of the test and even numbers from the other alternate form. Two scores were obtained from each test; one set from odd, and the other from the even numbered items. Using Pearson Correlation the two sets of scores provided a measure of reliability of each half of the test. Spearman-Brown Formular was then used to get the reliability of the length of the test. The internal consistency was 0.81 at (0.05) level of significance.

Administration of instrument: The research instrument was administered in each of the States by 2 research assistants. In all, six research assistants were used. The on-line copy of the instrument was sent to the e-mail of research assistants. They were directed to print and make photocopies of the questionnaire. The administered copies were sent by courier to the researcher after the administration by the six research assistants. In all, 510 questionnaires were returned. 20 were not properly filled and were not used in data analysis.

Data analysis: The data generated were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation to give a summary of responses on the varied sexual, cultural abuses and the extent of discriminating treatment of widows in Nigeria. Using the appropriate statistical analysis, all hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Question 1: Do widows experience discriminating attitude from men in Nigeria?

Table 1: Widows experience concerned with discriminative attitude from men

	Yes		No	
	F	%	F	%
Do widows experience discriminating attitude from men in Nigeria?	98	98	2	2

Table 2: Widows experience concerned untold hardship deprivation and undue restriction

	Yes		No	
	F	%	F	%
Widows are subjected untold hardship	99	99	1	1
Widows are subjected to deprivation	97	97	3	3
Widows experience undue restriction in their sexuality experience	51	51	49	49

In analyzing this question, data on responses of widows concerned with their experience was used frequency counts and percentages were used. The finding is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows 98(98%) reported that widows experience discriminating attitude from men in Nigeria.

Question 2: Are Nigerian widows subjected to untold hardship deprivation and undue restriction?

In analyzing the question data on the experience of widows concerned with untold hardship, deprivation and undue restriction were asked. Frequency counts and percentages were used. The finding is reported in Table 2.

Table 2 shows 99% of widows are subjected to untold hardship 97% are subjected to deprivation while 51% experience undue restriction in the sexuality experience in Nigeria.

Table 3: The extent which widows treats worse their other women in Nigeria

	Not at all		Mildly		Severe		Severe	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Gravity of sexual abuse	71	7	10	10	12	12	7	7
Gravity of cultural abuse	4	4	5	5	19	19	72	72
Psychological trauma	5	5	6	6	70	18	71	71

Table 4: The varied experiences of widows

S. No.	Varied experiences at widows	Yes		No	
		F	%	F	%
1.	Dehumanizing experience	89	89	11	11
2.	Difficult economic sapping practices	95	95	5	5
3.	Harmful traditional practices such as sharing of hair	95	95	5	5
4.	Period of mourning which last 6 months to 1 year	94	94	6	6
5.	Psychological torture	93	93	7	7
6.	Violation of right of inheritance	90	90	10	10
7.	Reduction of social status	88	80	12	12
8.	Harmful health practices	90	90	10	10
9.	Oppression and intimidation	91	91	9	9
10.	Discriminating norms for women	91	91	9	9
11.	Removing of husbands relative by widows in reproductive years	86	86	14	14

Question 3: To what extent are widows treat worse their other women in Nigeria?

In analyzing this question, data on the experience of widows concerned with the extent of treatment of discriminatory attitudes toward widows were used. The reports were made using not at all mildly severe and very severe. Table 3 shows the extent of treatment of widows compared to non widows.

Table 3 shows few women experience sexual abuse, while very high percentage (majority) experience cultured abuse and psychological. Trauma as shown in Table 3 about 19% experience sexual abuse, in severe and very severe manner. 72% experience, very severe level of cultural abuse while 71% experience very severe level of psychological trauma among widows.

What are the varied sexual, cultural, psychological and dehumanizing experiences of widows in Nigeria? In analyzing this question, data concerned with the experience of widows were used. Frequency counts and percentages were used in discretion the experiences of widows concerned with cultural, psychological and dehumanizing experience. Table 4 shows the varied experiences.

Table 4 shows that widows in Nigeria experience different dehumanizing experiences, difficult economic sharp practices, psychological torture, and harmful health practices and are forced to remarry the husband's relative after the death of the husband.

Hypotheses testing:

Hypotheses 1: There is no significant difference in the experience of widows of different level of education.

To test this hypothesis, the mean score of level of education with the scores of experience of widows were subjected to analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Table 5: Difference in the experience of widows of different level of education

	SS	df	MS	Fcal	Sig.	f. table
Between groups	26.295	3	8.765			
Within groups	1402.945	96	14.614	0.600	0.617	2.65
Total	1429.240	99				

p>0.05

Table 6: Analysis of variance showing the experience of widows from difference religions

	SS	df	MS	Fcal	Sig.	f. table
Between groups	14.819	3	4.940			
Within groups	1414.421	96	14.734	0.335	0.800	02.65
Total	1429.240	99				

p>0.05

Table 7: Analysis of variance showing the experience of widows of different age groups

	SS	df	MS	Fcal	Sig.	f. table
Between groups	57.081	4	14.940			
Within groups	1372.159	95	14.444	0.988	0.418	02.65
Total	1429.240	99				

p>0.05

Table 5 shows f-calculated was 0.600 while f table was 2.65. Hence the hypothesis is accepted. Therefore there is a significance difference in the experience of widows of different educational levels.

Hypothesis 2: Widows from different religions would not experience a significant difference in their experience of widowhood. To test this hypothesis the mean score of the different religion and that of the experience of widow's were subjected to analysis using analysis of variance. The finding is shown on Table 6.

Table 6 shows f-ratio was 0.335 while f. calculated was 2.65. Hence the hypothesis is accepted. Therefore widows from different religions would not experience a significant difference in their experience of widowhood.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant different in the experience of widows of different age groups. To test this hypothesis the mean score of the different age groups and the experience of widows were subjected to analysis of various. The finding is shown on Table 7.

Table 7 shows f-ratio 0.988 while f table is 2.65. Hence the hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the experience of widows of different age groups.

DISCUSSION

The study examined the varied sexual cultural, psychological and the humanizing experiences of widows in Nigeria. The study also investigated the implications of these varied abuses for HIV/AIDS prevention for the widows in Nigeria. In the study several findings were made for example Table 1 shows that widows experience discriminatory attitude from Nigerian men. 98% of women reported the experience of discriminatory attitude from men. Table 2 shows 99% of widows are subjected to untold hardship 97% to deprivation while 51% experience

undue restriction in their sexual experience in Nigeria. This findings is supported by IPPF (2002) which reported gender based violence as a form of discrimination that seriously inhabits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedom on the basis of equality with men. Widowhood practices are practices, which is rooted in superstition, this practice is discrimination against women, men do not morn their wives in the same manner hence this practice is only observed by women. According to Ede (2007) widowed practices intimidate women, oppress them and the practices are observed purposely to oppress and guarantee for the widows and the living, respect among the in-laws, lots of blessing from the ancestors. These reasons are however, grossly inadequate in the light of prevailing realities.

Table 3 shows 19% experience severe and very severe manner of sexual abuses, 72% experience very severe manner of cultural abuse, 71% experience very severe manner of psychological trauma as a result of widowhood practices. This finding correspond to that of Ede (2007) who reported that of 80% widows experience psychological trauma, harmful practices, rough treatment by close relatives of late husband and other harmful cultural or customary practices damaging to women such as rape. This finding also corroborate that of ECPAT (2007) which noted that the observance of traditional, cultural practices which mirrors the community's value and which are passed from generation to generation and that these practices are common, harmful and still prevalent in African Countries such as Nigeria.

The findings of the research shows Nigerian widows experience dehumanizing experiences, difficult economic sapping practices, psychological torture, violation of right of inheritance, oppression and intimidation and varied experiences of sexual abuse. This finding is supported by Ede (2007) and Watts and Zimmerman (2002) which reported that widowhood practices such as economic

exertion, deprivations harmful health practice, rough treatment are experienced by widows. Furthermore women are shown of property right or inheritance right and are also subjected to other harmful cultural or customary practices damaging to women. This findings is also supported by ECPAT (2007) which noted that in many African countries, the right to be free from harmful traditional practices, forced marriage, violence including physical, verbal, psychological or economic abuse, sexual harassment or sexual violence continue to elude Nigerian widows. Widows therefore are at high risk of sexual abuse; they are particularly vulnerable to sexual infection and sexual violence from men and boys who are associated or related to their late husband.

The finding of this research is so because some of the important factors hinder HIV/ risk behaviour reduction and actualization in Nigeria.

The findings of this research shows there is no significant difference in the experience of widows with different educational level, those different age groups and widows from different religions. This indicates that even the level of education; religion and age of individuals do not matter in the experience widowhood practices. One would have expected the experience of people with higher education to be different from those with lower level of education. Education is expected to decisively determine a woman access to reproductive rights, however even when women have had to improve their reproduction by acquiring higher education. In many instances such further education rather than liberate them, had further exposed them to even more vulnerable violence and threat by men. Educating women makes men to feel threatened because of the apparent shift in the balance of power which most men resist very vehemently. This is the case of widowhood practices in Nigeria. Non discrimination on grounds of sex is a norm of international law. Hence gender based violence involves gender inequality and power imbalance between male and female.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this result is so because of the inherent gender bias and the fact that the Nigerian society is culturally patriarchal and the women is traditionally disadvantaged and relegated to the second pedestal. It might also be because the phenomenon of violence against women has not quite attracted the kind of attention that it rightly deserve compared to other issue of gender bias. Gender based violence could also mirror the level of development of a country. The level of gender based violence could be due the level of development in Nigeria. In an orderly society, law and order are strictly kept for the safety, respect and the dignity of individual. Gender violence is still being practiced because incidence

of out dates customs and practices, fear and abuse and outright violence have not been dealt with by the legal relief which are available to victims of violence in other countries. It may also be because the judiciary in Nigeria is shrouded in obscurity and remain primarily underdeveloped. Gender based violence against widows may be prevalent because appropriate legal reforms have not been put in place such that the constitutional rights of women are guaranteed in terms of access to land, sexual and psychological abuse.

The high rate of discriminatory attitudes toward women, and the high level of psychological torture, cultural abuses and sexual abuse women experience has led the researcher to conclude that widowed inheritance is a harmful traditional practice, and constitute sexual exploitation and gender based violence in Nigerian. The researcher has also concluded that as important factor which hinder HIV risk behavioural reduction is widowhood, hence cultural factors and ideologies that denies the known methods of transmission in order to maintains cultural practices should be eliminated in Nigeria.

In other to promote and protect the basic right of widows and safeguard them from abuse, exploitation and HIV/AIDS, there is need for the government to do something concerning the culture of gender inequality, gender violence against widows in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATION

In our society there is need to educate Nigerians that gender based violence, such as widowhood practice is harmful, because it affects the psychological, social and infringe on the human right of widows. Issues which affect the self esteem, sexual and inheritance right of women should be addressed.

The society should no longer treat widows as animals. Dehumanizing a person on the basis of sex is bad aid since the reasons for observing such culture is grossly inadequate in the light prevailing realities there is need to stop widowhood practices in Nigeria.

Nigeria can no longer pretend that women are not being hindered by the psychological, cultural and sexual abuse they experience. There is nothing whatsoever in the biological composition of women that makes them inferior to their male counterpart's Women constitutive about 69% of the entire population, violence against women is a concern which requires the concerted efforts of all stakeholders in Nigeria. Nigerian widows should be liberated from the shackles of outdated customary practices and prejudice which hitherto infringe on the sexual right, inheritance right and psychological make up. Therefore appropriate law should be put in place such that the constitutional rights women are guaranteed in terms of

prevention of any act of gender based violence that could result or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm. Considering the level of sexual abuse among widows, the issue of widowhood in relation to HIV/AIDS prevention needs to be attacked. If HIV/AIDS prevention is to be effective in Nigerian this would necessitate a cultural shift in terms of gender role expectation in Nigeria, subordination of women in Nigeria, which limits their ability to decide when, how and with whom they should have sex, socio cultural barrier to proven preventive methods of HIV should be dealt with in Nigeria. There is need to promote and protect the basic human right of widows safe guard them from sexual abuse, exploitation, and HIV/AIDS.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The research was self sponsored however, I acknowledge the University of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria for creative an enabling environment for this research and for the inclusion of research allowance in my monthly salary.

REFERENCES

- ECPAT International, 2007. *Confronting the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Africa*. Bergkole 104vo Thailand. Retrieved from: www.ecpat.net.
- Ede, E., 2007. *Women in Rural Areas: Elepeye Widowhood Practices*, Department of Religious Studies, River State College of Education, Port-Harcourt. A paper presented at the 2007 National Conference Workshop of Network for Health Education and Welfare of Special People (Meeting the Needs of People with (DISTINCT PECULIARITIES) held at the Conference Hall, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.
- International Planned Parent Federation (IPPF), 2008. *from Choice, a World of Possibilities: Sexual Rights on IPPF Declaration*. IPPF 4 Newshams. Row London SEI 372 United Kingdom. Retrieved from: evebwww.ippf.org.
- Watts, C. and C. Zimmerman, 2002. *Violence against women: Global scope and magnitude*. *The Lancet*, 359: 1232-37.