

## **SILENT TEARS BEHIND RECYCLED OBNOXIOUS TRADITIONAL WIDOWHOOD PRACTICES IN NIGERIA: AN INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

**Tosin Emmanuel AKINDUYO (Ph.D)<sup>1\*</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>Department of Guidance and Counselling, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria*

### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated the silent tears behind recycled obnoxious traditional widowhood practices in Nigeria. The age-long widowhood practices are embedded in trauma-laced traditional norms, negatively affecting the well-being of widows in Nigeria. This study adopted an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) qualitative design. Twenty-five (25) widows voluntarily participated in this study using snowball sampling techniques from different widows' support groups. A semi-structured interview was used to obtain information from all participants. This enables widows to share their lived experiences of various traditional widowhood practices, which were regarded as obnoxious and dehumanizing to them. Data collection was conducted in seven (7) steps, using semi-structured interviews. It was concluded that recycled obnoxious traditional widowhood practices in Nigeria, as expressed by widows, are cruel treatments, financial constraints, loss of companions, disinheritance, sexual concerns, and assault/exploitation. It was recommended, among others, that, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 5, there should be a well-grounded legal framework that promotes gender equality, eradicates gender-based discrimination, and empowers all women.

**Keywords:** Recycled, silent tears, traditional practices, widowhood, Nigeria

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### ***Corresponding author:***

Tosin Emmanuel Akinduyo,  
Department of Guidance and Counselling, Adekunle Ajasin University  
Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria  
Email: tosin.akinduyo@aaua.edu.ng /tosigno07@yahoo.com

### **INTRODUCTION**

Marriage, whether contracted or permanent, in Africa appears to be culturally acceptable based on mutual agreement between husband and wife. This agreement has terms and conditions that encourage the couple to live together, have sexual intimacy, procreate, and be legally recognized as husband and wife. Regardless of the relationship's

length—whether long or short—death can destabilize the relationship and lead to its end between husband and wife. The death of a husband not only causes permanent separation but is also accompanied by abrupt loss (Oniye et al., 2018), along with trauma, stigmatization, depression, isolation, accusations, mental stress, blame, anxiety, grief, bereavement, and loneliness. A woman who loses her husband automatically shifts from being a wife to a widow; this exposes the widow to untold hardships and vulnerability. Globally, death is a source of concern that cannot be openly wished upon someone, but is often celebrated when the deceased is wealthy and of advanced age (Amoo et al., 2022). In Nigeria, studies have shown that 372 out of 1,000 men die between the ages of fifteen (15) and sixty (60) years old, compared to women (WHO, 2016); women tend to live longer than their husbands (Aderemi & Ogebe, 2024).

Widowhood is a state of losing a husband to death, which can result from various factors. These include HIV/AIDS, diseases (Ude and Njoku, 2017); marrying older men (Akinduyo & Linda, 2024); conflicts, including arms (Amornkul et al., 2009; The Loomba Foundation, 2015); incautious driving (Ishiekwene, 2022); health concerns, hazards from jobs, accidents, poor access to healthcare, substance abuse, and the burden of family responsibilities. The death of a husband is a traumatic event (Akinduyo & Theron, 2024) that exposes women to many challenges, such as intense grief, maladjustments, sorrow, and sudden lifestyle changes (Chami & Pooley, 2021; He et al., 2014; Sekgobela et al., 2020), posing risks to their mental well-being in society.

The number of surviving widows in Africa has been substantial, with over 258 million (UN Women, 2021); with 16% out of the total population of adult women in sub-Saharan Africa are widows (Amoo et al., 2022). Widows have been exposed to all kinds of abuse, obnoxiousness, and ill-treatment. Studies have shown that the majority of widows face repeated daunting challenges that significantly alter their well-being and survival, often without meaningful intervention from stakeholders. Korang-Okrah et al. (2015) reported that African widows encounter property violations immediately after their husbands' deaths, including the seizure of their houses, cars, lands, furniture, and children, which predisposes them to poverty. Other risks faced by widows include stigmatization, prolonged mourning periods, ill-treatment, physical abuse, assaults, and the blame game, among others. Obielosi and Ochuko (2023) argued that despite technological advancements and religious practices in Nigeria, widows are required to prove their innocence by drinking some of the water used to clean the deceased husband's body, undergoing forced shaving of their hair, and remaining unkempt for extended periods.

Despite the large number of widows in Nigeria, popularly called the giant of Africa, the harmful traditional rites inflicted on widows are still passed down from one generation to another. As observed, at no point are the harmful widowhood practices prevented from being experienced by Nigerian widows. Ude and Njoku (2017) affirmed that many African cultures enforce harmful customary rites and practices over constitutional laws, predisposing widows to difficulties due to cultural factors (Dube, 2023); that undermine human worth, freedom, and dignity.

As reported by Oguiche et al. (2024), widowhood traditional rites in Nigeria are heavy and forceful. All the recycled obnoxious widowhood rites are being consciously passed from one generation to another, while widows' voices are not heard in Nigeria. As perceived by many Nigerian widows, subjecting them to many horrible, obnoxious traditional rites was traditionally carried out to stave off the spirit of the deceased husband

from appearing, harming, and disturbing the widow. Amlor and Owusu (2016) stated that Ghanaian culture compelled widows to wear black cloth for a minimum of six months with specific guidelines such as not accepting a love proposal from any man, not discussing with anyone at night, and abstinence from the matrimonial bed being used when her late husband was alive. Wearing black cloth (mourning cloth) makes widows unattractive and repulsive during the length of the mourning period (Obielosi & Ochuko, 2023), while the reverse is the case when a man loses his wife.

Restriction of movement, seclusion, and/or confinement of widows after the loss of their husbands is a traditional rite a widow must experience mandatorily. Obielosi & Ochuko (2023) further explained that widows were absolutely prevented from moving from one place to another, especially within the first twenty-eight (28) days, to allow full-blown customary activities. These include desisting from taking her bath, sitting on the bare floor, being fed by another widow from isolated, broken plates, and using a knife or broomsticks to touch her body if necessary, without using her hands. In the South-Eastern part of Nigeria, during the period of seclusion, widows are commanded to sit not far from the corpse of the late husband, weep at intervals, bath on the graveyard, and not receive commiseration gifts with their hands but pick them from the floor (Nwanmuoh et al., 2025). Unfortunately, during confinement, many widows were reportedly raped; they silently keep living with the trauma as part of the risks attached to mourning rites and/or the fear of stigmatization. Quickly after the husband's burial, the mother-in-law would bathe the widow with cold water the following morning, while the widow acts in accordance with the tradition, by repeatedly calling the pet name(s) of the late husband for a period of ninety-six (96) hours (Eze et al., 2024). All these traditional rites jeopardise widows' autonomy, self-determination, basic human rights, worth, self-esteem, worth and dignity.

Forceful remarriage is another obnoxious traditional widowhood practice, causing widows negative mental outcomes. Everyone has his/her determinants in selecting his/her spouse, but in the case of widowhood, they are coerced to marry someone in the late husband's family, whether they like him or not. According to Ugwukah and Ume-Ezeoke (2024), the existence of forceful marriage, especially among young widows to the late husband's relative or younger brother, accepting this type of marriage allows the widow to maintain her relationship with the late husband's relatives and retain their inheritance. In some instances, without the consent of the surviving wife, the husband at the point of death requests that if he dies, his wife should be transferred or inherited by one of his brothers (Kebede & Zeleke, 2019); the family, being aware of the tradition enforces the order of the late husband even against the wish/consent of the widow. Widows not interested in the forced marriage experience poor relationships with in-laws, emotional, physical, psychological, and health problems during this period. Apart from forcing widows into non-consenting marriage, obnoxious widowhood rites, and child betrothal have been another ill-treatment linked to forced marriage (Fiasorgbor, 2018).

Forced marriage in Nigeria has been bedeviled by a series of communicable and non-communicable diseases that speak so much about the severity of the obnoxious treatment being experienced by widows. Idoniboyeobu and Obiechina (2018) posited that forcing a woman to marry a member of the late husband's relatives could aid the spread of HIV/AIDs especially if the widow has been infected before the demise of the husband.

Given this, the new husband having wives before or later gets his former and/or new wife/wives infected, and the deadly disease gets transmitted through the subjection of widows to obnoxious treatments.

Widowhood traditional practices in Nigeria include different types of cleansing practices that are dehumanising, before a widow can be reintegrated into free and full societal activities. Sexual cleansing as a sacred African practice is to cleanse and purify the woman from the spirit of the late husband. This obnoxious traditional rite bolsters unprotected sexual intercourse with numerous sexual partners (Ayikwukwei et al., 2007). Widows who counter cleansing rites are prevented from social relationships, friends making, defamed, secluded, and ridiculed (Nwokike, 2017). Unfortunately, during cleansing traditional rites, widows are expected to shave their hair, including the pubic hair, wear the deceased husband's clothes, tie fibres from plants around their waists, and wear black dresses (Ayikwukwei et al. 2007). Shaving of head, armpit, and pubic areas could be done using an unsharpened razor blade and fragments of a bottle, with fowl sacrifice and recitation of incantation during the rites are common practices in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria (Iheanacho, 2015). It is traumatic to note that sexual cleansing could be done by the deceased husband's relative (Munala et al., 2022) or a hired non-relative sexual cleanser (Ayikwukwei et al., 2008). All these ill-treatments appear to be enforced on the surviving widow, without compliance to the traditional rites' dictates, she would face grievous consequences (i.e., in terms of physical, psychological, and spiritual adverse effects) in the society in which she lives.

Naturally, a woman is terribly hit when her husband dies, but many traditional rites in Nigeria prescribe a long mourning period for widows, especially those who are not in one accord with the husband's relatives. Eze et al. (2024) reported that some Igbo societies in Nigeria compel widows to mourn their late husbands for six to twelve months, despite the widows' irreplaceable loss. This period is agonizing for widows (Shahin, 2022); the length of the mourning period negatively affects life gratification (Okoro et al., 2021). A study conducted by Muhammed and Idowu (2020) argued that widows react differently to the mourning period based on different factors. However, widows' consents are never sought for the number of months or years required for the mourning and bereavement in honour of the late husband.

The gender disparity in the treatment of widows and widowers puts widows at a vulnerable position. Shahin (2022) affirmed that widowers receive societal love, care, full consolation, and immediate encouragement to remarry. While women are stigmatised, isolated and suspected of being responsible for their husband's death, widowers are not exposed to the same treatment. The Nigerian cultural beliefs have declassified women as inferior to men. Widows silently bear the pain of recycled obnoxious widowhood practices in Nigeria, as if it is normal, and/or to prevent maltreatment from the late husband's family members or society. Of concern is the continuous transfer of these obnoxious traditional widowhood practices from one generation to another. These ill-treatments have negatively predisposed women to untold psychological problems that need urgent intervention on behalf of Nigerian widows. This study will be guided by a lone research question: What are the recycled obnoxious traditional widowhood practices and horrible treatments in Nigeria?

## Theoretical Framework

This study adopted Patriarchy Theory, establishing a relationship with the work of Walby (1990), describing organised composition and practices that silence, enslave, control, and ill-treat women in areas such as sexuality, household, jobs, violence, cultural establishments, and promote gender inequality. Meagher (2011) further explained inequality in the treatments meted out on men and women across the globe, promoting women's exploitation, men's supremacy over women, and the exertion of force on women (including sexual violence). Patriarchy theory accepts the maltreatment of women (Smith, 1990; Yllo & Straus, 1990), promoting cultural rites that dignify only the male gender in society (Ali et al., 2013). Given this patriarchal theory, widows are not entitled to their rights, inheritance, and mourning rites of their late husbands; they are left to the mercy of family members/relatives who are dominated and supported by women. Generally, widowhood practices in Nigeria are awkward due to male dominance of all the societies and a high level of poverty among women (Adeyemo, 2016); the dehumanization of widows persists across different societies, hence making widows helpless to fight for their rights, deprived of personal privileges, vulnerable instead of being safeguarded, and voiceless to speak about ill-treatments against them. The total dominance of women's rights has been a bane on the recycled obnoxious traditional widowhood practices in Nigeria.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This qualitative study adopted an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach to explore widows' investigation of their personal and often distressing widowhood experiences in Nigeria. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is considered suitable for this study because it focuses on individuals' lived experiences rather than relying solely on existing literature (Adetola et al., 2017); this approach helps uncover actual explanations through the interpretation of recurring themes in the collaboration between the researcher and respondents (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). A total of twenty-five (25) respondents were selected using snowball sampling techniques from different widows' support groups. According to the International Council for Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Pharmaceuticals for Human Use (2016) and Manti and Licari (2018), informed consent was obtained from participants through voluntary oral agreement to participate in the study, with the researcher ensuring all willing participants were assured of the strict confidentiality of their information. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather information from all participants, allowing them ample opportunity to freely share their lived experiences of various traditional widowhood practices they face, which are often considered obnoxious. During the interviews, both verbal and non-verbal cues from the participants were carefully observed. These observations aligned with Aborisade and Chineyemba (2025), who note that signs of stress when widows recount their experiences—such as uncontrollable tears, extended silence, shivering, a weak voice, frequent pauses, signs of distress, and discontinuing the discussion—are important indicators. The collected data were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore lived experiences (Tomkins, 2017), explaining how individuals navigate or struggle with their personal and social adversities (Hallam & Noon, 2018). Following Bawono (2023), data analysis was done using seven (7) steps that involved a) Reading and re reading; b) Initial noting-taking; c) Developing occurring themes; d)

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Arrangement of higher themes; e) Proceeding to the next case; f) searching for patterns between cases; and 7) Arrangement of all higher/mega themes.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

#### **Emerging Theme 1: Cruel treatments**

P4 &. *After the death of my husband, I thought the whole world collapsed on my head. I was called a*

P 23 *witchcraft, shamed, offered an isolated room, forced to wear black attire, and forced to sleep on my husband's burial ground, with profuse crying.*

P9. *I was given 6 months of compulsory mourning.... a male family member shaved my head, armpit, and pubic hair and armpit. I was not permitted to attend any gathering and was eating from damaged plates and unhygienic places.*

P1. *To prove my innocence, I was forced to drink part of the water used to bathe the corpse of my late darling husband...I was not trusted...I was sick without medical attention...was sitting on the bare floor at the time I will be given a local mat to sit on, and eat from broken plates.*

P3. ....*Stigmatisation and lack of respect..... compelled seclusion....avoidance of my shadow.....compulsory weeping and wearing black attire were my experiences.*

P18. *I was isolated like a waste bin, treated like a crime suspect, providing answers to many questions. My honour got reduced immediately, and I was being fed like a local family pet.*

P22 & 11.....*was mandated to avoid seeing my shadow, hence, was put in a non-illuminated room. Also, many avoided seeing me early in the morning, because it was a sign of bad luck to first see a widow in the morning.*

#### **Emerging Theme 2. Financial Constraints**

P2: *At the time of his death, I was not gainfully employed. It was difficult to feed myself and his 3 three children and my aged mother.*

P7: *He died a month before our rent expired; our landlord only gave us an extra two months before ejecting us out of the house. I had to change the schools of the children to a public school due to many financial demands.*

P25. *Though there was an initial support from my in-laws, after some time, to eat three good meals per day became difficult. Even to buy wears for the children was another difficult problem for me.*

P14. *I could not pay for electricity/NEPA bills.....I could not maintain our vehicle and do major repairs at home.*

#### **Emerging Theme 3: Loss of a companion**

P5&8: *I missed my best friend, soul-mate, helper, and encourager. I felt empty because he was like an umbrella over me.*

P10: *My late husband was a good cook and helped with other house chores. He was a shoulder to lean on, assisted with making good decisions. He encouraged, motivated, and supported me a lot.*

P13: No one to keep secrets with, and I was left doing everything alone, without any help around me. I lost a lover who was always around me to make sure I was doing well.

#### **Emerging Theme 4: Disinheritance**

P15: *As if we used our properties as collateral for a loan, my in-laws came to forcefully seize our debit cards, farmland, plantation, phones, jewelry, and some farm animals*

P24: *Our children were told to move to their father's family.....financial documents retrieved.....our house documents, laptops, kitchen equipment, and the shop were seized. Some of them were sold to offset the burial preparation, while they keep some of the proceeds to themselves.*

P20: *My late husband's family took possession of all my ex-husband's properties as if they were the owner*

#### **Emerging Theme 4: Sexual concerns**

P16 & 21. *I experienced rape during sexual cleansing, sexually transmitted infections, inhibited sexual urge, and masturbation. Due to prolong mourning period, I experienced vagina dryness, masturbation, and anal sex, and an accusation as prostitute.*

P 17: *I received threats that if I did not marry my late husband's younger brother, that I will be ejected from his house. Many people who were not my choice were asking for a sexual relationship with me.*

#### **Emerging Theme 5: Assault/Exploitation**

P12. *My in-laws became violent towards me, blaming and defaming me for the loss of my husband.*

P19. *I was beaten for not being willing to observe inhumane widowhood traditional rites as prescribed cultural norms.*

Table 1: Summary of Emerging Themes from recycled obnoxious traditional widowhood practices and Horrible treatments in Nigeria?

S/N	Major Themes	Sub-themes
1	Cruel treatments	Long mourning period, seclusion/isolation, wearing of black attires, mandatory wailing/weeping, sitting on bare floor, eating from broken plates, cooking with broken plates, avoiding one's shadow, shaving of armpit/ head hair/pubes hair, stigmatisation, accusation of witchcraft, drinking of water used to bath the corpse, sleeping at the late husband's graveyard, reduced respect, poor access to medicare, exclusion from social activities/gatherings,
2	Financial Constraints	Loss of family breadwinners, losing a major source of income, temporary support from family members, more financial burden due to sole responsibility for Medicare, house rent, children's education, constraint feeding of feeding children alone, taking care of my aged parents alone.
3	Loss of a companion	Loss of a friend, demise of a confidant, eternal separation from a protector, domestic partner, decision-maker, lover, supporter, burden-bearer, and motivator
4	Disinheritance	Seizure of children, farmland, cars, houses, money/bank

		account/Debit cards, live-stocks, jewelry, plots of land, shares/investments, shops/offices, phones, electronic gadgets, kitchen wares, laptops, and the manipulation of legal documents and denial of rights
5	Sexual concerns	Rape, forced marriage, hormonal imbalance reducing sexual urge, risky sexual cleansing traditional rites, prolonged period for sexual abstinence, unsafe sexual practices, uncensored marital proposals, vagina dryness, tagging widows who seek sexual relationships as prostitutes. Exposure to sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
6	Assault/Exploitation	Physical beatings/assault, blame-game, gossip, defamation, violence, and all kinds of threats to compel widows to comply with prescribed obnoxious widowhood traditional rites.

## Discussion

This study revealed that many Nigerian widows experience recycled, harmful traditional widowhood practices in Nigeria that are passed down through generations, often ignoring their silent tears. These mistreatments are deeply embedded in the cultural values and norms of every Nigerian community, enforcing meaningless widowhood rites targeted solely at widows, while widowers do not face such treatment. Out of twenty-five respondents in the study, twenty (20) widows reported cruel treatments, such as long mourning periods, seclusion or isolation, wearing black attire, mandatory wailing or weeping, sitting on the bare floor, eating from broken plates, cooking with broken plates, avoiding their shadows, shaving armpit, head, or pubic hair, stigmatization, accusation of witchcraft, drinking water used to bathe the corpse, sleeping at the late husband's graveyard, experiencing reduced respect, physical abuse, poor access to healthcare, exclusion from social activities or gatherings, manipulation of legal documents, and denial of rights. These findings support Khosa-Nkatini (2022), who states that a minimum of twelve months is the prescribed mourning period for African widows: seclusion affecting their overall well-being (Wani et al., 2025); wearing black clothes throughout the mourning period (Obielosi & Ochuko, 2023); shaving pubic and other hairs; sitting on the bare floor or mat; being prevented from bathing for a set number of days; witchcraft allegation leading to expulsion from the community (Platzer, 2018) and being forced to swear she did not kill her husband (Nana, 2020). Furthermore, widows are subjected to systemic physical abuse (Kiwala & Olanya, 2023), and they often lack adequate access to basic healthcare that supports their psychological well-being (Sekgobela et al., 2018). This situation may be linked to male-centric societies that subordinate women, insisting on total submission to men even at the expense of their well-being.

It was found that widows face serious financial challenges (i.e., loss of family breadwinner, loss of a primary income source, temporary support from family members, increased financial burden due to sole responsibility for Medicare, house rent, children's education, and the burden of feeding and caring for children alone, as well as taking care of aging parents) after their husband's death. A plausible reason for this finding could be the cultural belief system in Nigeria that a man, as the head of the family, should provide for all his family's needs. Considering this cultural belief, his death would likely cause the surviving wife to experience severe hardship if she had not been working, trading, and empowered before his death. This aligns with the findings of Kamunyu and Makena (2020)

that widows face serious financial deprivation and economic challenges, experiencing increased poverty status in the society (Calvi, 2020); death of a breadwinner (Bonthuys, 2021); and predisposing widows to poor socio-economic status in Nigeria (Essein et al., 2020).

In addition, this study revealed that losing a companion (i.e., loss of a friend, demise of a confidant, eternal separation from a protector, domestic partner, decision-maker, lover, supporter, burden-bearer, and motivator) was another distressing ordeal experienced by widows after the loss of their husbands. Widows expressed their sadness for losing husbands who were their intimate friends, sexual partners, and those who supported them in all areas. Cultural values in Nigeria prescribed that husbands must protect their families from harm, but at the occurrence of death, a woman loses a security provider, making them vulnerable to risks. Beyond this, a man tends to provide unrestricted endearment to the wife, children, relatives, in-laws, and extended family members. To widows, losing a husband amounts to a departure from someone who guides and helps to share good and bad moments in the marital journey. In agreement with Putri and Dasril (2025), widows to a certain extent lose security and face emotional stress immediately after the demise of their husbands. Facing these hardships as a widow may be a source of silent tears, which only the widows can understand the gravity of the irreparable loss.

It was discovered that many widows are vulnerable to disinheritance after their husbands' deaths, including the seizure of children, farmland, cars, houses, money, bank accounts, debit cards, livestock, jewelry, land parcels, shares, investments, shops, offices, phones, electronic gadgets, kitchenware, laptops, and the manipulation of legal documents and denial of rights. This aligns with Korang-Okrah and Haight (2014), who state that women, especially in developing countries, often lose opportunities to own property or land. This grossly violates women's fundamental human rights to ownership, leading to poverty for the wife and children. Platzer (2018) reaffirmed that disinheritance or seizure of widows' property is not only carried out by her in-laws but can also be done by immediate family members. Culturally, widows are believed to be unqualified to own property, and any widow resisting property seizure may be expelled from her husband's house and lose all her benefits. Nwoaga et al. (2021) found that in Igbo-land, Nigeria, the seizure of property from widows upon a husband's death is a longstanding tradition confronting Igbo women.

This study discovered widows' traumatic sexual experiences after the demise of their husband (i.e., rape, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, hormonal imbalance reducing sexual urge, risky sexual cleansing traditional rites, prolonged period for sexual abstinence, unsafe sexual practices, uncensored marital proposals, dryness of the vagina, sex-for-money, tagging widows who seek sexual relationships as prostitutes. exposure to sexually transmitted infections). This finding agrees with the findings of Mishra (2015) that the majority of widows are victims of all sorts of rape in their countries, aided by obnoxious widowhood traditional practices prescribing cleansing rites that aid rape and the risk of contracting different infectious diseases such as HIV (Ambasa-Shisanya, 2007; Platzer, 2018). Sadly, widows are sexually exploited during the cleansing rites, such as shaving of the pubic hair, bathing, and seclusion, even against their consent. Moreso, marriage ought to be a choice or consented affair, leveraging on mutual understanding that

allows the widow to either marry from the late husband's family or any family of her choice, or to stay single. Conversely, a recycled traditional rite prescribed forced or levirate marriage, which mandates the widow to remarry from the late husband's family. Moronya et al. (2023) condemned levirate marriage because it is opposed to the values of African traditional marriage and a form of slavery, denying widows their basic fundamental human right to choose what suits their consent, and sexual harassment (Mir et al., 2022). Sexual cleansing for widows was carried out to take off impurity from widows, transmit traditions, and enhance their eligibility for remarriage (Munala et al., 2022). In Yoruba land, Opo-sisu (levirate marriage) is an age-long tradition that is against human worth and the quest for equality, but the Yoruba race in Nigeria believes this tradition helps in the preservation of the late husband's property, and the protection of widows (Odumosu & Opebiyi, 2021), while others believe levirate marriage helps to preserve the family name from going in to extinction. Given all these, this study found that, due to prolonged seclusion traditional rites, widows complained of inability to have access to unlimited sexual intercourse, dryness of the vagina due to stress/husband's death, and many marriage proposals from both young and old. Though the widows who participated in this study named a sexual concern "sex-for-money," that was an indirect name for prostitution. Widows reported that they needed money to pay bills such as house rent, children's school fees, food, Medicare, personal upkeep, shop maintenance, and care for their aged parents, among others, which were burdens on them. On this note, they were involved in prostitution with different men to survive; with some widows saying "they had to use what they had to get what they needed". This finding supports the findings of Odhiambo et al. (2025) that one in four widows in Kenya contracted HIV, which is six times more than the number of widows who remarried, with an increased risk of getting infections.

This study found that assault/exploitation (i.e., physical beatings/assault, blame-game, eviction, gossip, defamation, violence, and all kinds of threats to compel widows to comply with prescribed obnoxious widowhood traditional rites) is a traumatic experience for widows in Nigeria. This is in line with the findings of Ajayi et al. (2019) that Nigerian widows faced extreme violence after the death of their husbands. They found that widows absolutely submitted, obeyed all traditional rites, resigned to fate, and believed in the superiority of traditions. Ude and Njoku (2017) explained that all sorts of assault in Igbo tradition start immediately after the death of a husband is authenticated; this is possible because of gender inequality and viewing a woman as a man's property, which she must prove her innocence through traumatizing traditional rituals. Without the opportunity to carry out an autopsy to know the cause of the husband's death, the surviving widow automatically becomes the prime suspect responsible for the husband's death. Blames were heaped on the widows; they experienced physical beating, became objects of mockery, and might be evicted from the husband's house and treated with disdain. One of the limitations of this study is that the findings do not mirror the lived experiences of all widows in Nigeria. Also, the findings of this study do not consider the cultural beliefs and age group of widows used for this study; this may result in the findings not applying to both young and old widows.

## CONCLUSION

The silent tear behind recycled obnoxious traditional widowhood practices in Nigeria is alarming, due to poor mental outcomes of widows who form a major part of the nation. This study has shown that the voices of widows are unheard, their silent cry is unseen, and dehumanizing widowhood traditional rites are recycled with more agonizing spices. This study further showed that women are yet to find their right places in all cultural tenets, predisposing the female gender to obnoxious treatments. The recycled obnoxious traditional widowhood practices in Nigeria, as expressed by widows, are cruel treatments, financial constraints, loss of companions, disinheritance, sexual concerns, and assault/exploitation. It is recommended that there should be a well-grounded legal framework promoting gender equality that eradicates gender-based discrimination and empowers all women. The fight against obnoxious widowhood practices in Nigeria is not adequately in place. This study recommends that the Ministry of Women Affairs, in collaboration with the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and traditional institutions, should make the plights of widows known through the fight against recycled obnoxious traditional widowhood practices through seminars, orientation programmes, and massive campaigns.

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