

## Review Article

## Negative Impact of Widowhood Rite as it Affect Marital Happiness Amongst Married Women in South – South, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Widowhood rites are intended as ways of showing respect for the dead and proof of the inconsolable sadness of the widow. But these rites expose the widow to psycho-emotional and physical indignity, which constitute major factors that influence the level of happiness or unhappiness experienced in most marriages or homes. This paper identifies some concepts of widowhood, widowhood rites and some Negative Impact of Widowhood Rite in some communities in the South – South, Nigeria. It also examines the dehumanization and marginalization of widows; factors that contribute to stress of widows that affect marital happiness or unhappiness in South – South, Nigeria; and also explains some components of marital happiness and the causes of marital unhappiness. Finally, the paper proffers some recommendations.

**Keywords:** Negative Impact, Widowhood Rites, Dehumanization, Marginalization and Marital Unhappiness.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background of the Study

Marital happiness is a judgment made by a spouse that indicates the sense of well-being or satisfaction he/she experiences in marital relationship. It is an overall appraisal of the degree of happiness with various dimensions of one's marriage. It is a powerful indicator of marital quality, although it does not capture specific behavioural correlates; for example, marital happiness correlates with other indicators such as marital interaction, marital conflicts and so on (Amato, Booth, Johnson & Rogers, 2007). It has also been found to correlate with the presence of children in the family, household income, welfare use, egalitarian attitudes, traditional marital attitudes, religiosity (Amato et al, 2007). Marital happiness is a mental state that reflects perceived benefits and costs of marriage to a particular person (Shackelford & Buss, 2000). The more costs a marriage partner inflicts on a person, the less satisfied one generally is with the marriage and with the marriage partner. Similarly, the greater the perceived benefits are, the more satisfied or happier one is with the marriage and with the marriage partner (Bradbury, Fincham & Beach 2000 & Oghiabephan, 2018).

The central status accorded marital happiness in this research area has also gained the attention of researchers from a various disciplines, including psychology, sociology, family studies and communications. To this day, what has been variously labeled marital happiness, satisfaction, adjustment, success, companionship or some synonym reflective of the quality of marriage remains the most frequently studied aspect of marriage. This focus is, perhaps, not surprising because the protective effect of a happy marriage on the mental and physical health of spouses, as well as the healthy development of their children, is well documented (Fincham, Stanley & Beach, 2007 & Oghiabephan, 2018:2).

Initially, researchers, mostly sociologists, paid great attention to identifying demographic correlates of marital happiness using large scale surveys and went on to complement this effort by examining individual differences associated with marital happiness (Fincham, Stanley & Beach, 2007).

A variety of biological, psychological, religious and philosophical approaches have contributed to the sources and understanding of marital happiness. Oholi (2002) and Nwaonu-Igbomaka (2010) have identified a number of attributes that correlate with

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marital happiness. They include mental status, employment, health, democratic freedom, optimism, religious involvement, income and proximity to other happy people as factors which contribute to how couples feel about their marriage. Philosophers and religious thinkers often define marital happiness in terms of living a good life or flourishing rather than simply as an emotion. Marital happiness amongst married women is a variable which depends on anxiety, level of education as well as socio-economic status.

There are many components that make up marital happiness. They include a combination of family background, personality characteristics, attitude towards intimacy and sex, gender roles, values of spouses, ethnicity, culture and religion, honesty, trust and fidelity, acceptance and appreciation, ability to live with change and so forth.

However, a happy marriage is one in which two people love each other, get along well together, think alike on important issues, share common goals and interests, have fun together and respect each other. It should be noted that a successful marriage is a happy marriage and a happy marriage is one in which one finds marital happiness. Some families have broken because the problems that erupted within them could not be solved. This may be because either no attempts were made to solve the problems or both sides in the conflict were adamant and refused to budge their positions. Sometimes, peace initiatives are rejected by either or both parties. Every home has one problem or the other but the way they are handled shows maturity of the husband or wife or both (Oghiagbephan and Ikekhua, 2008 and 2010).

People do have various impressions about marital happiness and, based on this, form stereotypes about marriage. This stereotyping about marriage could be either positive or negative based on one's life experiences. Some people see marriage as a bed of roses, and therefore, their needs must be met by their spouses. In that vein, the individual has a positive attitude towards marriage and works hard to make the marriage a happy one. Some others view marriage as full of problems since they do not have the necessary ingredients to make it a success (Oghiagbephan and Ikekhua 2008 & 2010).

There are many components or causes of marital unhappiness in our society today. They include lack of money to provide for the basic needs of the spouses and other family members, workaholic spouse, peer group influence, unfaithfulness of either of the spouses, in-laws influence in the marriage, domineering attitude of either of the spouses and the issue of childlessness in the marriage. Others include the issues of step children from either of the spouses or both, one sex children, age of the couple and incompatibility of the couple.

Life is a mixture of positive and negative emotions for everyone. Some people experience excessive levels of negative emotions that could be identified as being nervous, tense, worried, scared and anxious. These terms all refer to anxiety. Thousands of people experience such uncomfortable and disruptive levels of anxiety that are said to be disorders. Women are more affected by anxiety disorders than men (Igharosa and Uruejoma, 2013) cited in (Oghiagbephan & Ikekhua, 2014:69). These kind of anxiety disorders vary considerably, but all share heightened reactivity – provoking events and increased vigilance for those events, (Rosen, Shulkin, 1998 & Oghiagbephan, 2018) especially among married women in South-South Nigeria.

Negative Impact is a state of normal reaction of alertness and a fundamental mode of response experienced by everyone that is troubled. It is a diffuse feeling of uneasiness. It is an adaptive response because it prepares people for the task at hand thereby making them ready for fight or flight.

The death of a husband is a tragedy that befalls a woman as it involves physical and emotional break in their relationship; it is seen as a most stressful and devastating incident in life. It is a time when everything should be done to assist widows to withstand the emotional and psychological trauma, pain and frustration associated with the loss and not to add to their problems. Unfortunately, the reverse is the case in African tradition. Instead of helping the widows to ease themselves from their problems and live a better life, people choose maltreat them (Oghiagbephan, 2018:7).

In different parts of Nigeria, widows are treated differently due to difference in cultures. In Abia State, widows are not allowed outside during the burial ceremony of their husbands and are not allowed to see the bodies of their late husband's when the casket are opened for relatives to see for the last time. Sometimes, widows are sexually abused by the brothers or uncles of the deceased man, as supported by traditional sanctions and customs (Erinosho, 2000 & Oghiagbephan, 2018).

In Udu Local Government Area of Delta State, especially in Igbisi, Igbogidi, Emadagia and so forth where the researcher hails from, as soon as a man dies, the woman (widow) is brought into the living room to sit on a mat, leaving her matrimonial bed. In the living room (parlour), sympathizers come to visit her to console her. One week later, the hairs on her head, private part and armpit are shaved by a female member of the husband's family which may be the elder sister or aunty and, then, taken to a nearby river or stream to bathe, which represents cleansing known as "Ame Erivwin". After the bathing, she puts on mourning cloths which may either be black or blue in colour (Oghiagbephan, 2018).

The Negative Impact is about if her husband dies, she may be made to shave her hair, swear an oath over the dead body of the late husband, eat from a particular plate with her left hand for the period of mourning, marry a male relation of the late husband, deprived her of basic personal hygiene, for example, not allowing her to take her bath for days, and so forth. In Oron, Ikot Ekpene in Akwa-Ibom State as well as Ilara Mokin in Ondo State, it also takes the form of practices like shaving the hair of the widow as if, by so doing, the dead husband will come back to life. All these bad treatments of widowhood rites have many negative influences on widows (Sossou, 2002 & Oghiagbephan, 2018:8).

The totality of forced behaviours and mode of dressing, eating, association with people in the family, tend to make the widow very unattractive, unhappy and increase her social problems (Oniye, 2000). The death of the husband can generate a lot of stress and anxiety with its attendant problems such as fear, nervousness, sleeplessness and nightmares which are capable of taking happiness from every married woman's heart (Adamu, 1993 cited in Oniye, 2000 & Oghiagbephan, 2018).

Widowhood rites are closely tied to cultural and traditional anxiety about death, ghost inheritance, feminine roles, family structure and family relationships. Overpowering panic disorders is believed to be the ability of a dead person's ghost to come back to dispute with and haunt the living relatives and others. The belief that the dead still have contact with the living, especially their closest relatives in life, is one of the reasons for subjecting widows to inhuman and humiliating customary rites. The successful completion of these ceremonies, rituals and rites is believed to help restore balance and security, which the dead is thought would have worked against.

Although widowhood rituals are intended to show public respect for the dead and proof of inconsolable sadness of the widow, they expose the widows to psycho-emotional and physical indignity. A fundamental social change in her status is dramatized, emphasizing her faithfulness to her late husband's memory, and her chastity during the marriage period. The supposed moral justification of widowhood rituals among localities in South-South Nigeria is based on the purpose of meeting the perceived needs of the dead, his living relations and dependants (Idialu, 2012 & Oghiagbephan, 2018:9).

The death of a spouse, especially the husband, has its consequences on the wife because of some cultural and traditional rites that prescribe intense wailing, seclusion and general isolation of the woman in Nigeria especially in the South-South Nigeria. The woman faces a lot of agony in losing her husband from the man's family and the society or community in

different ways such as shaving of the woman's hair, washing the deceased persons' body and giving the water to her to drink, wearing of black cloths, starving and so on (Ojedapo, 1994 in Oniye, 2000 & Oghiagbephan, 2018).

The fear of a husband's death is a variable that may cause married women a lot of concern in marriage. Some may fear that if their husband dies, the man's family may claim all the property they both laboured for many years and, as such, may want to acquire their own property secretly without the knowledge of their husbands. Some married women may build house(s) without their husbands' knowledge. Even some husbands may have more than one wife and have children outside; this may bring unhappiness to the marriage thereby making married women to take to acquiring properties without their husbands knowing. Some may fear that should their husbands die, they will lose everything they struggled to acquire with their husband and this may create a gap in the marriage.

All these fears are due to how widows are treated in some areas according to customs and traditions.

### **Concept of Widowhood**

The term "widowhood" is the state or period of being a widow. A widow is a woman whose husband is dead and not remarried (Agunwa, 2011 & Oghiagbephan, 2018:22).

The death of a husband is a tragedy that befalls a woman as it involves a physical break in their relationship and seen as a very stressful and devastating thing in life. It is a time when much care and aid should be given to widows to help withstand the emotional and psychological trauma, pain and frustration associated with the loss and not to do things that will add to their problems. Unfortunately the reverse is the case by Africa tradition. Instead of helping the widows to ease their problems and live a better life, people choose to maltreat them.

In many societies, widowhood is a process characterized by rituals, forced remarriages, harassment, rejection, loneliness, poverty, loss of status, fear of the future and depression (Ntozi, 1997 in Agunwa 2011 & Oghiagbephan, 2018). The degree of expression of the negativities depends on the communities' culture, religion and economic system. Widowhood is a life situation that currently attracts a lot of discussion and even seminars (Ikeotuonye, 1998 cited in Ocholi, 2002). The loss of husband is a traumatic experience that can have a devastating effect on the individual. The range of effects is from crying through grief to outright insanity (Ikeotuoye, 1998 cited in Ocholi, 2002). Furthermore, a woman whose husband dies has a lot to cope with (Ocholi, 2002).

In contemporary society, the plight of widows is the focus of modern social psychology and rehabilitative counselling. Thus the question being asked is as to how widows cope with life in a society which, ordinarily, should be a cure to weaker sex of which widows are part (Abdulsalem, 1995). The plight of Nigerian widows seems to be naturally embedded in the culture that encourages gender inequality. For example, the typical widow in rural Nigeria is taken through harmful widowhood rites by older women, children and their husband's families (Olusakin, 1998 cited in Ocholi, 2002 & Oghiagbephan, 2018:23).

### **Widowhood Rites**

Ntozi (1997), in Agunwa (2011) says that widowhood practices are closely tied to cultural and traditional beliefs about death, ghosts, inheritance, feminine roles, family structure and family relationships. The overpowering belief in the ability of the ghost of a dead person to come back to dispute and haunt some things and relatives has reinforced and perpetuated the age-old practices of widowhood in Africa. The belief that death brings corruption and the dead still have contact with the living, especially their closest partners in life, is one of the reasons used for subjecting widows to inhuman and humiliating customary practices. The satisfactory completion of these ceremonies, rituals and practices is, therefore believed to help restore the balance and security, which the dead is thought to seek to overthrow. The people, due to superstitious beliefs, rationalize these practices with the argument that they perform important functions, such as giving the widows protection from their powerful deceased husbands (Sossou, 2002 & Oghiagbephan, 2018:25).

In some areas, women are expected to observe a cleansing ritual, which has sexual components, before being re-incorporated into the society. Some widows are confined to their homestead for a whole year since they are considered culturally impure and dangerous to the community. During this period, a widow is expected to have a dream where she engages in sex with the deceased. The sex dream is an indication that the widow was free to be cleansed. Indeed, widowhood taboos are lifted after the final post-burial ritual where the life of the deceased is celebrated. Therefore, widows are given to men in the community to guard them, with a view to providing material and emotional needs.

Widowhood practices in many parts of Nigeria lead to health concerns. The practices include drinking of the water used to wash the corpse of the husband, washing the woman with a mixture of the water from the decomposed body of the deceased, beating the woman to make her confess she is responsible for the husband's death and cutting of her hair to humiliate and shame her. This has led the Rural Widows and Orphans Foundation (RUWOF), recently, to call on the newly sworn in National Assembly in Nigeria to present a bill

on the protection of the rights of widows and orphans in the country (Auta, 2007:37 in Agunwa, 2011). The confiscation of the husband's/family's property by the husband's family and leaving the woman and her children with nothing to live on constitutes a health hazard.

Contrary to what a wife suffers when she loses her husband, the man who loses his wife is usually not accused of killing her. If the man is rich economically, the wife is accused of killing the man in order to deprive the woman and her children of their right to inherit the properties left behind by the husband. The behaviour undermines the fact that the wife helped to build the home and properties with her husband. These practices affect the physical, psychological, social and cultural well-being of the woman. Some of these women suffer from depression and mental disorder after going through these travails. Sometimes, some widows are inherited by their late husband's relatives as frequently done at Esan Ohordua, Irua and Ekpoma communities of Edo State (Ozo-Eson, 1997 in Turner, 2005). These practices could be prevented by enacting laws that prohibit them in Nigeria (Turner; 2005:296 & Oghiagbephan, 2018:26).

### **Negative Impact of Widowhood Rite in some communities in the South – South, Nigeria**

Negative Impact of Widowhood Rite explain why, in some cultures, the women are disguised by being rubbed with charcoal, wearing rags, carrying bows and arrows, canes, brooms and cutlasses, which are supposedly meant to scare away their late husband's spirit. In some cases, some medicinal herbs believed to have the effect of scaring spirits are left burning at the entrance of the room to prevent the spirit of the husband from coming after her. There are numerous factors influencing anxiety over widowhood rites which may include cosmology, religion, illiteracy, low concept of women, male-dominated society, female passivity, inheritance and marriage laws of the land, the extended family system, poverty, gender blindness and so forth (Onyenuchie, 1999 and Idialu, 2012 & Oghiagbephan, 2018).

Erinosho (2000) narrated that the ordeal of a widow begins with accusations and victimization by the next of kin of her spouse who hold the view that she (the widow) is responsible for the death. She may be forced to swear before a family shrine and/or to drink water that has been used to wash his corpse in order to prove her innocence. It is believed that any of these measures can be used to establish her culpability and a widow who suffers dire consequences thereafter is said to be guilty while anyone who does not is acclaimed innocent.

Erinosh (2000) says that a survey carried out under the auspices of the Better Life Programme (BLP) in Imo, Rivers, Edo, Delta and Bayelsa States revealed that widows are deemed to be ritually unclean at the demise of their husbands. They could not touch any object without defilement and were provided with pieces of stick to scratch their bodies to avoid defilement. Widows reported that their impurity extended to all aspects of their lives. For example, their meals were cooked in old pots rather than those normally used for cooking for other members of the family. They have to sleep on old mats placed on wooden planks or old doors. The rationale for restricting widows to the use of old items is because the items are to be disposed of or burnt at the end of the mourning period (Oghiagbephan, 2018:27).

Also, Ohansi (1977 & Oghiagbephan, 2018) reported that widowhood rites of Imo, Rivers and Edo States, South-South Nigeria consist of uncontrolled loud wailing and falling on the floor, cooperating fully with her sisters-in-law to fully strip her of clothing, be poorly fed, appear unkempt and remain completely ostracized during the pre-burial period, agreeing to undergo a trial to absolve her of complicity in her husband's death, drinking impure or poisonous concoctions such as the water used to wash her husband's corpse, deprivations of husband's assets by her husband's kin. He also noted that, in spite of their cooperative attitude, widows usually transit from relative luxury to penury when her husband's kin deprive her of all the assets she toiled with him to acquire.

The totality of expected behaviours, including, mode of dressing tend to make the widow very unattractive, unhappy and increase her social problems (Oniye, 2000 in Oghiagbephan, 2018). The death of a spouse (particular a woman's husband) can generate a lot of stress and anxiety with its attendant problems such as fear, nervousness, sleeplessness and nightmares. The widow has a role-less status in the family except in rare situations when she is quite advanced in age that she is considered as one of the reservoir of knowledge. Widows are treated as sub-human beings which usually created a situation of fear of husband's death in every married woman thereby sometimes robbing her of happiness in marriage (Adamu, 1993 and Oniye, 2000 in Oghiagbephan, 2018).

In many cases children of widows are forced to drop out of school, work, and become destitute due to lack of access to their fathers' resources. The tendency has been to discriminate against female children, especially as regards schooling even when the kin of the dead (mostly brothers, male cousins and uncles) allocate some of his resources for the upkeep of children (Osimiri, 1990). Widows go through harmful pre and post – burial rites, whereas widowers do not (Idialu, 2012:9 & Oghiagbephan, 2018).

Widowhood is a traumatic life experience and process that naturally evokes sympathetic treatment. But the reverse is always the case in some communities - Edo, Delta and Bayelsa States in the south-south geo-political region of Nigeria. In Edo State, the treatment faced by women who lose their husbands is very inhuman and unfortunate. In most cases, they are accused of killing their husbands and, as such, subjected to various kinds of trials and ordeal. After the period of mourning, they are subjected to the psychologically frustrating experience or process of being inherited by the heir or next of male kin of their late husbands. Any attempt at rejecting these attracts total ostracization from her husband's family, and even withdrawal or limited access to their children (Onyenuchie, 1999). Widowhood rites may also involve both physical and psychological violence to the widow (Oghiagbephan, 2018:30).

### **Dehumanization and Marginalization of Widows in South-South Nigeria**

Widowhood rites in Igbo land begin before burial ceremony. According to Nwezi (1989 & Oghiagbephan, 2018), the widow's ordeal starts immediately after the husband's death. The relatives demand documents pertaining to the husband's property, including land, investments and bank accounts. Furthermore, the widow is required to provide expensive items, including a white goat and two jars of palm wine for purification purpose to the female members of her husband's lineage who make and implement decisions on every matter concerning widows.

The widows are seen as ritually unclean at the demise of their husbands and so they should not touch any object. So sticks are given to them to scratch themselves to avoid defilement. They are locked in with their husband's corpse for several hours and made to lie, for about ten (10) minutes, beside the corpse of their deceased spouses (Idialu, 2012) in Oghiagbephan, 2018. The heinous rituals a woman goes through as soon as her husband dies are innumerable (Agunwa, 2011).

In Ebele, Ewu-Ishan, Iguebe, Uromi Opojje, places like Ohordua, Irua, Ekpoma, Ihruekpe and a host of other places in Edo State, the treatment faced by widows is very inhuman and unfortunate. In most cases, they are accused of killing their husbands and, as such, subjected to various kinds of trials and ordeal. After the period of mourning, they are subjected to the psychologically frustrating experience or process of being inherited by the heir or next of kin of their late husbands. Any attempt to reject it, attracts total ostracization from her husband's family and even denial of or limited access to their children.

In Edo State, especially among the Esan's a widow is given a ritual pot to carry on her head as soon as the husband dies, the wife is expected to mourn him publicly for at least seven days. While carrying this pot, she is asked to confess her sins against the man. She is left on the ritual site and asked to walk alone from the eerie (strange and frightening) fetish spot. In Igbo speaking states, before the man is buried, the widow is stripped naked and made to have the last sexual intercourse with the man by lying with the corpse in a room all night (Onyenuchie, 1999 and Agunwa, 2011). She is also armed with a bow and arrows to protect her from the husband's spirit. Earthenware pot with fire glowing from within is left at the door of the room where the widow is. During the mourning period, she is expected to go to the cemetery to have her bath. She is expected to shoot an arrow into the bush to stop her dead husband from coming to her. During this period, she must eat alone with her left hand. She sleeps on the floor with a mat because anything she comes in contact with during that period will be thrown away on the 7th day. On the night preceding the 7th day, the woman is forbidden to sleep. She is not allowed into the main house. After she has been through with all the rites for 7 days, she begins a 3 months mourning period. During this period, she uses charcoal to smear her forehead and wears black clothes continuously (Idialu, 2012 & Oghiagbephan, 2018).

In Ideato Local Government Area of Imo State, as soon as a man dies, his widow sits on the ground and can only be allowed to call anybody by the use of a gong. This forced dumbness impose on the widow by culture is subjected to a variety of interpretations (Agunwa, 2011).

In the past, the woman was required to remarry the man's older or younger brother. That has changed due to civilization. In some cases, the woman remains the family member and allowed to use the husband's property to cater for herself and her children. In some other cases, the woman is permitted to leave the family after the mourning period if she is good to the family members before the death of her husband (Agunwa, 2011).

In Ikot Ekpene in Akwa-Ibom State, a husband's death is attributed to magical and religious factors and widows are targets of accusations of bewitchment or sorcery and are, therefore, blamed for the death of the man (Ugweeze, 1997 in Oloruntinetin, 2002 and Agunwa, 2011). Ugweeze (1997) observed that as soon as the husband dies, his wife is summoned by a group of old women who confine her to a room where she is forced to sit on a floor for as long as the dead is not buried. She is not to wear shoes, sandals or slippers, nor allowed to cut her nails or change her clothes as she would have wished. She is not allowed to have her bath as long as she is in confinement. She is permitted her to change her clothes after the burial. This

is followed by a second shaving and cutting of her nails signaling a complete separation from the dead.

The next stage is to choose a husband for her from within the confines of the extended family of the dead husband. Having made the choice, she is mandated to offer the old women some specified quantity keg of palm wine, fowl and items demanded by them. These items are presented to the men of the family who, thereafter, approach the selected new husband. If he rejects the offer, the widow is made for another man who is also from within the family. On acceptance, the man is required to buy some clothes, tubers of yam and other items, as demanded by the custom, for the new wife. The new wife is, then, officially informed and made to meet the new husband for the first time (Ugweeze, 1997 cited in Agunwa, 2011 & Oghiagbephan, 2018).

Among the Itsekiri speaking tribe in Warri South, Warri South West, Warri North of Delta State, widows mourn their husbands for seven days and within which they are expected to shave their hair and some rituals performed on them. In the past, they were made to sit on the bare floor but with civilization, this has been modified by using mattress. After seven days, widows are made to wear complete black cloths for a period of one (1) year, after that one year, she changes to navy blue cloths for another six (6) months, no matter the age of the woman. She is not allowed to be seen in public places. She is also made to marry any male member of the family. If she refuses, she is made to suffer together with her children.

In Udu Local Government Area of Delta State, especially at Emadagia, Igbisi, Igbogidi, Okualadja, Okolor-Botor, Egihegi and Ekperherhe as soon as a man dies, the woman (widow) is brought into the living room to sit on a mat, leaving her matrimonial bed. In the living room (parlour), sympathizers come to visit and console her. A week later, the hair on her head, private part and armpit are shaved by a female member of the husband's family and then taken to a nearby river or stream for bathing, a type of cleansing known as "Ame Erivwin". After the bathing, she puts on mourning cloths which may be either black or blue in colour.

Before now, the woman is questioned about what killed the husband or if she had any knowledge of what led to the death of her husband, especially if the death is mysterious or suspicious. When it is three (3) months after the burial, the woman is brought before the elders' council of the husband's family to share the husband's property where she would be given as a wife to her husband's son, if he had a son with another that is old enough to marry. If not, she would be given to his younger brother, and if there is no younger brother, she is given to an uncle or another male family member of the husband to marry (Oghiagbephan, 2018).

The woman has the right to object to be given out. If she refuses, she is asked to refund the dowry to the person the family shared her to or, if she decides to stay in the late husband's house to take care of her children, then she will remain unmarried in the compound. If the dowry is refunded, she is prayed for and allowed to leave the family and marry any man of her choice.

Widows are humans and should be treated well by their late spouses' relatives and members of the community. These rites which are considered appropriate by the culture are, in most cases, detrimental to the health and well-being of widows and their offspring; therefore, the rites, to a large extent, should be stopped to enable women live normally despite the death of their husbands (Idialu, 2012:10 & Oghiagbephan, 2018:35).

#### **Factors Contributing to Stress of a Widow as it Affects Marital Happiness**

Some of the conditions that take away happiness in marriage from women when they lose their spouse include:

- Loneliness in Widowhood
- Differences in Education
- Economic Status and Widowhood
- In-Laws (Husband's Relatives)
- Education and Widowhood

#### **Components of Marital Happiness**

A normal family is a family that is peaceful. Whenever any problem arises in such a family, a rational solution is sought. However, the following are observed as components or characteristics of happiness in marriage: Members have emotional attachment, parents are responsible and play their roles accordingly, members love one another, the children are well cared for, the family members feel very happy most of the time, there is a co-operative attitude and understanding between the spouses, the spouses have cordial relationship with their relations and in-laws and other members of the extended family (Oghiagbephan and Ikekhua, 2008 and 2010).

Forgiveness is an important and powerful tool in marriage. Each spouse should forgive the faults and mistakes of their partners. Perceived wrongs and resentment from the past should not be held on to. Built up anger should not be allowed to mar the happiness of the marriage. This is not to say there are no instances when anger is justified; there are. However, it is important that spouses deal with their negative feelings and put them behind them. The emotion and time spent in remaining angry would be better spent working to attain happiness in the marriage (Okorodudu, 2010; Oghiagbephan and Ikekhua, 2010).

#### **Causes of Marital Unhappiness**

Families have been broken because of problems that erupted and could not be solved. This may be because either no attempts were made to resolve the problems or both sides in the conflict were adamant and refused to budge their positions. Sometimes, peace initiatives are rejected by either or both parties, but this is not to the advantage of any of the parties. Every home face problems, but the way problems are handled show maturity of the husband or wife or both. There is no need resorting to physical combat or exchange of abusive words without first of all using the method of dialogue. The best ways to solve problems of marriages are through prayers, readiness and determination to solve the problem and to see the marriage work. With God's guidance, the problems would be solved amicably (Oghiagbephan and Ikekhua, 2008 and 2010 & Oghiagbephan, 2018:68).

Below are some causes of unhappiness in marriage: lack of money to provide for the basic needs of spouses and other family members, workaholic spouse, negative peer group influence, unfaithfulness of either of the spouses, in-laws influence, domineering attitude of husband or wife, childlessness, sexual problems, consumption of drugs and alcoholic beverages, and the issue of step children from either the husband or wife or both parties, (Oghiagbephan and Ikekhua, 2010).

The husband may not be able to satisfy the wife sexually or vice versa. The following factors could be responsible for this: erectile problems, premature ejaculation, late ejaculation, frigidity, one sex children (probably only male or only female), childlessness, age of the couple, the control of family finance, lack of communication, inter faith marriage (Christian versus Moslem), Inter domination marriage (Jehovah Witness to a Catholic member), incompatibility between the couple, step mother and step children syndrome, illness which could lead to prolonged physical separation, and role enactment (that is, a spouse not taking up his/her responsibilities) (Nwoye, 1997, Echebe, 2010, Oghiagbephan & Ikekhua, 2008 & 2010).

It should be noted that disturbances in marriage occur when expectations of the couples are being frustrated. For instance, counsellors should note that family discord can occur when one partner does not match with the subjective image of the other, when expectations of the partners are discordant, when expectations of the institution of marriage are violated, when expectations of the family of orientation of spouses are not met, and when there is dysfunction at the level of expectations from marriage (Juvva & Bhaai, 2006, Okorodudu, 2010:72 & Oghiagbephan, 2018:69).

In line with the above orientation is the fact that: “when two people decide to marry, they anticipate a welcomed change in their lives... a newly married couple does not simply make superficial changes in their lives, they do not merely enter a new social status, rather they enter an entirely different world, a world filled with the unexpected. New experiences are usually demanding and require major adjustment. A couple finds that nothing is quite the same as it is before marriage. Throughout the different stages of marriage, couples require adjusting to each new experience, each stage brings” (Okorodudu, 2010:72).

An addition to the above mentioned reasons for marital problems that call for counselling, is the issue of neurotic interaction in marriage relationship. For example, psychologists believe that when couples and/or other members of the family demonstrate neurotic behavior tendencies, there could be serious cases of relational dysfunction between the couples and/or among members of the family. Nwoye, (1997:14) & Okorodudu (2010:72) identified five neurotic interactive situations in marriage. They include a situation involving the marriage of an aggressive and sadistic partner to a dependent, submissive and masochistic person (that is, a person who gets sexual pleasure from being physically hurt), a situation involving the marriage of an emotionally detached person to a partner who has intense need or desire for strong affection, a situation involving two married individuals who strongly desire to dominate each other and find themselves endlessly trying to control each other but ending up with protracted experiences of fighting, quarreling, attacking and defending themselves, a situation involving the marriage of a helpless partner who depends on a saviour partner that is equally looking for someone to provide him with help, a situation involving the marriage of alcoholics who get drunk during most hours of the day.

These situations enumerated above are better managed by professional trained persons such as marriage and family counsellors, psychologists, psychotherapists and psychiatrists. However, marriage and family counsellors have to get the approval of clients in this regard before making referral (Okorodudu, 2010:73 & Oghiagbephan, 2018:70).

Professional marriage and family counsellors are expected to be able to distinguish happy families from unhappy ones and channel their professional skills and competences towards helping to maintain stability in happy homes and assist to reduce distress in unhappy marriages. Creer (1997:310) & Okorodudu (2010:103) pointed out twenty characteristics of behaviour in unhappy marriages. They are when couples do not think alike on many issues, when one’s spouse has little insight into one’s feelings, when couples say things that hurt each other, when one often feels unloved, when one spouse takes the other for granted, when one spouse

rarely complements the other, when one has to give in more than the other spouse does, when one desires more affection, when one often feels neglected, when one keeps things to him/herself, when one cannot please the other spouse, when couples do not confide in each other, when spouses are not open to suggestions, when one cannot discuss anything with one’s spouse, when one spouse is stubborn, when one spouse cannot accept the other’s criticism, and when one spouse magnifies the other’s fault.

Family counsellors should understand that positive affirmation to any and/or a good combination of the above traits or behaviours found among couples clearly indicates a status of an unhappy marriage that needs immediate therapeutic attention. The couples involved must be encouraged to undergo well arranged marriage and family counselling sessions where they can address the issues (Oghiagbephan, 2018:71).

## **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter is concerned with the summary of the study, drawing a conclusion and making some possible recommendations.

### **CONCLUSION**

Across different cultures in South-South Nigeria, there exist different traditional widowhood rites. These rites vary from culture to culture and the degree of intensity also varies culturally because of the complex ethnic plurality. Widows are subjected to near inhuman treatment such as solitary confinement, disinheritance, long period of mourning, shaving of hair and ostracisation. These have far-reaching effects such as acute stress and depression, poverty, loss of identity and self-esteem, which affect marital happiness. Based on this, the study looked at the relationship between anxieties over widowhood rites.

However, the paper explained some Negative Impact of Widowhood Rite in some communities in the South – South, Nigeria; how some of these widows are being dehumanize and marginalized in the society, listed some factors that contribute stress to widows as it affect marital happiness, discussed components of marital happiness, causes of marital unhappiness and mentioned some recommendations.

### **Recommendations**

The findings of this research have far-reaching implication for the counselling profession and the Nigerian educational system. Based on the findings, the researcher make the following recommendations:

- All married men should be counselled properly by professional counsellors to empower their wives to be self-sustained without totally depending on their husbands.
- Counselling widows, whether new or old ones, require special skills and, as a result of this, the



counsellor must put in extra efforts to control their emotions and reactions. It is important to act calmly and rationally even though they are worried and anxious.

- Counsellors should assist their clients (Widows) to evaluate the severity of their (clients') situation. This is necessary in order to determine whether the widow is in danger, which must be judged by her reactions and not by the nature of the event.
- All women should have a means of livelihood whether educated or not, rich or poor so that they can be economically stable.
- Wives should try to maintain a cordial relationship with their husbands and extended family members.
- There should be public enlightenment campaign to educate people on the plight the widows are passing through. This should include workshops, seminars, posters, stickers, handbills, radio and television jingles, health and safety talks. Women should also be educated to change their behaviours towards widows especially those women usually used against their fellow women in time of bereavement.
- Women should try as much as possible to do things by themselves without totally depending on their husbands.

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