



Widowhood Rites and Women's Fundamental Human Rights In Ekiti State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT:- Several Nigerian women are subjected to various harmful traditional practices in the name of widowhood rites. These often result in the violation of their fundamental human rights and freedom. This is because, the Nigerian society like many other societies the world over, is male-dominated and matters relating to women are treated as an addendum.

Therefore, this study attempts to examine widowhood practices in Ekiti State, Nigeria as it affects women's fundamental human rights. It also undertakes a socio-historical and gender analytical interpretation of widowhood and the problems encountered by widows in Ekiti State using three local government areas of the state as case study. The instrument used in collecting data is the questionnaire with open-ended and pre-coded questions. The study concludes that, more attention should be given to women most especially the widows and that their fundamental human rights should be respected at all times.

Keywords:- Culture, human rights, widowhoods.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tradition in Africa is as old as Africa itself. It is the way of life of the African people that is founded on their existence. Traditions among Africans are strong and cannot be taken away from the people even as it thrives to the point of working against them. There are so many of these traditional practices that are harmful to women viz the issue of female genital mutilation, widowhood practices, ritual killings, son preference over a daughter and many more. These beliefs and customs perpetuate the inferior status of women. Harmful traditional practices are practised in all parts of the country. However, some are more pronounced than others in different ethnic groups considering the diverse cultural systems of Nigeria as a country but our concern in this study is widowhood practices. Several Nigerian women are subjected to these harmful traditional practices resulting in the violation of their fundamental human rights and freedom. Some of these are staying in-door, wearing of black cloth, hair-shaving, oath-taking, widow-inheritance. From the point of the death of a man, his wife begins to go through the rituals associated with widowhood, whereas, all these do not accompany the death of a wife.

The study is divided into seven sections- the introduction of the paper, the methodology which shows the study area and sampling technique while the third section is the clarification of terms. The fourth section is an overview of widowhood rites in Ekiti State while the fifth section discusses the implication of these widowhood rites on women's fundamental human rights. Section six is the data presentation which includes data analysis and discussion of findings and the last section concludes the study.

II. METHODOLOGY

1.1. Study Area

The study area is Ekiti State, Nigeria. The Ekiti ethnic group is one of the Yoruba-speaking tribes, occupying the South-western zone of the country. Ekiti language and culture are predominant in all towns in the state. Therefore, the practices of widowhood in all the towns are similar.

1.2. Sampling Technique

The cluster sampling technique was adopted in this study since it has been said earlier that widowhood practices are similar in all the towns in Ekiti State. The state has three Senatorial Districts viz Ekiti Central, Ekiti

North and Ekiti South Senatorial Districts. To this end, one local government was randomly selected from each Senatorial District. The three local government areas selected are Ado-Ekiti local government, Ikere-Ekiti local government and Ido/Osi local government. The targeted population was one hundred and fifty respondents who were widows who were given questionnaires with questions relating to widowhood rites in the selected areas. The questionnaire was developed by Oluwatusin (2001) and validated by experts. Also, some elders were interviewed to elicit information on widowhood rites in order to get public opinion on the subject. Besides the primary data, secondary sources were collected from books, journals, seminar papers, newspapers e.t.c.

2. Clarification Of Terms

Culture: Culture defines accepted ways of behaving for members of a particular society (Daramola & Oluwatusin, 2013) thus culture varies from one society to the other. Iraq (2014: 36) also sees culture "as generally referring to patterns of human activity and the symbolic structures that give such activities significance and importance."

Human Rights: The United Nations has described human rights in the following terms- human rights could be generally defined as those rights, which are inherent in our nature and without which, we cannot function as human beings (Ige; 1996:4). This is because human rights and fundamental freedoms enable a person to fully develop and use all human qualities, intelligence, talents and conscience to satisfy both spiritual and physical needs. They are basic for mankind's increasing demand for a life in which the inherent dignity and worth of each human being will receive respect and protection. Human rights are universal and apply to all persons without discrimination; respect for individual rights needs to be upheld at all times irrespective of circumstances or socio-political systems.

Widowhood: The concept of widowhood is an integral part of the marriage system within any society and it varies from one society to another. It is also a state of being a widow. Owasanoye (1997) sees widowhood as "a tragedy, which befalls a married woman by the untimely or timely death of her husband. It can also be described as a period of hardship and deprivation which includes varying degrees of physical seduction and a state of ritual contamination or impurity calling for purification.

III. OVERVIEW OF WIDOWHOOD RITES IN EKITI STATE OF NIGERIA

Where a husband dies, there would be a loud wailing by wife/wives and kindred of the deceased except for traditional kings and chiefs which needed certain arrangements and rites to be observed by chiefs for the confirmation and announcement of their death. But for the widow of an ordinary man in Ekitiland, after the death of her husband, she goes into confinement for seven days with her hair loosen and unkempt. She is not allowed to go out or take her bath. She wears the cloth with the underwears that were on her when the husband died. Her chair and bed for these seven days is a mat on which nobody can sit except widows like herself. This is done because widowhood is associated with ill-luck which nobody wants to associate with.

On the seventh day, her hair is shaved to sever the bond between her and the dead husband (this is no more mandatory for widows). Some of my informants (widows) were not forced to have their hair shaved. Also, on the seventh day, she keeps a vigil and appears very sorrowful by wailing and crying profusely (Ayantunji, 2002).

For the burial of the deceased, the first daughter will bring a goat called "**eranbaluwe**" which means goat for bathing, which will be given to those who bathe the corpse. This goat will be slaughtered and its blood sprinkled around the house. Another goat called "**eranidaleru**" will also be provided by the children who will be given to those who dig the burial ground. The children of the deceased will also prepare pounded yam, which they will eat. Nobody except the people that digged the burial ground eat this goat.

Furthermore, the wives of the deceased's kindred will also come for the decoration of the house with local dye in preparation for the burial ceremony. In the process of burying the dead, a hen will be bought by the first child of the deceased which will be roasted and eaten by younger people leaving no remnant, This is referred to as "**adiyeirana**". The Yorubas used to say "**adiyeiranakiis'ohunajegbe**" meaning that everybody will die.

It should be noted that all these do not apply to any man that dies below fifty years in Yorubaland because it was believed in those days that it was an untimely death, which calls for no celebration. After this, the widow goes for mourning which ranges from thirty to days. The widow is expected to sit, eat and sleep on the mat (bed nowadays) where people will come and console her. Nobody can sit with her on the mat or bed as mentioned earlier, except widows. During the forty day mourning on the mat, she has to wake up early in the morning around 4 a.m. or late at night in the dark to take her bath. The younger sister of her late husband and in most cases buys cloth, which she uses for these forty days, or in the alternative it is bought by the widow out of the money sympathisers gave her when nothing is forthcoming from the sister-in-law. The cloth is washed every eight days at night by herself or another widow who is ready to assist. Her movement is restricted within the compound too.

On the fortieth day, the widow does not sleep, she sings along with other people who are women including her age-grade members throughout the night. In some places it is only widows that stay and sing with her throughout the night. The room where they are will be lit by a lantern, which must not go out. It is believed that if the lantern goes out, the widow is accused of killing her husband. Thereafter, she will be taken before an oracle to swear by the god of the land to vindicate her that she knew nothing about the death of her husband. But if the widow swears to this and is truly guilty of killing her husband, it is traditionally believed that she will die within seven or forty days.

Furthermore, in the early hours of the new day, she is taken to a river or stream in the outskirts of the town to be bathed by other widows. It is done during this time in order to avoid meeting with a man or a non-widow person. It is believed that if a man or non-widow person meets her, he or she will have ill-luck. Her clothing will also be burnt after the bath and she will be given a black or 'ankara' cloth to wear for another period of mourning which is a year. Today, some widows do take this bath in the front or at the back of the house because of civilisation.

Moreover, after the forty-day mourning, the widow observes the outing ceremony. This calls for celebration because it was believed that any widow who dies during these forty days was responsible for the death of her husband. She would be buried without any ceremony; her children would not even be allowed to witness her burial. Thus, for surviving those days, widows are proved innocent or vindicated. Thereafter, the widow is free to resume her normal activities but continues to wear the mourning cloth for seven or twelve months. The mourning cloth was usually made of black material before but these days, it is "Ankara or adire" with black background and it is no more mandatory for widows to wear the cloth for a year as it was in those days.

On completing the mourning, the widow will be allotted to her husband's younger brother or as decided by the 'Oloribi' who is the head of the family. If a woman refuses to be inherited she automatically forfeits the right of her children in that home. She will be driven out of the home and family. One immediate consequence of this is the likelihood of her children to drop out of school, to work, or become destitute with the sudden blockage of their mother's access to their family's (father's) resources.

IV. WIDOWHOOD RITES AND IMPLICATION FOR WOMEN'S FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS IN NIGERIA

A critical examination of the status of widows is done by intersecting relations between men and women with the relative positions of men and women within the economic, political, religious and familial spheres, showing how these have been and are continually reformulated. This way the documented vast and varied arrays of social practices that dehumanise and impoverish widows across Nigeria are shown to be commonly vivid illustrations of the violation of their fundamental human rights.

Several explanations have been offered for the harsh treatment meted out to widows in different parts of the country. As previously mentioned, the prevalence of witchcraft accusations and the belief that death when it occurs to persons that are relatively young is caused by sorcery or witchcraft are partly responsible for the difficult situation which widows find themselves. Another explanation of the difficult circumstances of widows is associated with the types of inheritance rules that are prevalent in a community. In societies where son inherit before brothers, widows' treatment tend to be less harsh than those in which inheritance is lateral, that is, brothers inherit before sons (Oloko, 1997).

Religious explanations are also commonly advanced by the members of the communities in which widows confront very difficult problems. People believe in continuity between the dead and the living, events that affect one positively or negatively affect the other. Since it is believed that the spirit of the husband is likely to hover around his widow(s) with whom he had the greatest intimacy during his lifetime; ritual cleansing are needed to sever the relationship between the dead husband and his wife(wives). In this context, it is reasonable to suggest that the unhygienic and appalling personal appearance of a widow was all part of an effort to make her no longer attractive to her otherwise would-be jealous, deceased husband and intending suitors. In other words, the harsh circumstances of widows are perceived as well intentioned acts, which evolved to protect the living from the dead.

Also, part of the religious explanation of the harmful widowhood rites is the belief that all the rites and practices associated with death must be meticulously carried out so that the deceased would be admitted into the spirit world. If the dead was denied admission into the spirit world, this means that his spirit would not rest and it may disturb his family members and the community at large. Thus, the widow's contribution to meeting these conditions include the observance of the practices previously discussed. The dead man's relations (male and female) had their own part to play for the purpose of achieving the same goal.

The satisfactory completion of these ceremonies, rituals and practices also helped to restore the balance and security, which the dead had sought to overthrow. With these acts, not only were all individuals who played

any part in the funeral purified of pollution, but also the living community was re-integrated after the loss of one of its members. Supporting these widowhood rites as protective, one of the elders interviewed explains:

What we are condemning as wicked acts are not, they are to guarantee the protection of the man while alive and they serve as a check on the diabolical wickedness of some women because they know what they would go through should their husband die (Alaba, 2011).

However, speaking on the violation of women's fundamental human rights through these harsh widowhood rites, most of the elders do not believe there is any kind of rights that women can enjoy without the support of their husbands' families. They believe women have to enjoy their so-called rights in their matrimonial homes and the observance of these rites will keep them in their respective matrimonial homes. Thus, they have to choose between their rights and their homes which as the Yorubas used to say "**ileokonileobirin**" (a successful woman leaves in her matrimonial home). This further show the extent to which the practice of patriarchy negatively affects the value culturally placed on womanhood in Nigeria.

However, we must ask ourselves these questions- how far does this protection go especially for widows? Does it apply to other aspects of the widow's life during and after the burial? What about her children? For whatever happens to the widow invariably affects her children.

In those days among the Yorubas, there were people who took the responsibility of preparing the food that widows usually ate during the confinement period but nobody is ready to add another person's burden to his or hers in our days. The family heads cannot mandate any member of the families for widows' meal. More so, civilization has affected the strong sense of belonging among families and the display of strong kinship solidarity. Many members of the extended families are no more living in the communities but in towns and cities where they are working thus, when any member of the family dies, they just come to the community to sympathise for a day or two and go back to their places of work leaving the widow (in confinement) and their children to cater for their needs.

Looking closely at the confinement of widows and the restriction of their socialinteractions for some specified period following their husbands' death, one will discover that it further strengthens the ideology of female domesticity and male control over female sexuality and reproduction. The children viz a viz the social and economic networks of a long confined widow almost invariably suffer reverses. (Ahonsi,1997).

With respect to the religious explanations that had earlier been given for widowhood practices, one need to question why widowers do not partake in such practices whenever they lose their wives. Or do the spirits of their wives not hover or disturb them and their communities as the men's spirits do? Also, if losing one's husband is associated with ill-luck, is losing one's wife a good-luck which everybody likes? If it is not a good-luck then widowers should also be made to undergo rites for their own purification. Similarly, irrespective of the 'ritual by ordeal' that helps the bereaved (widow) to rid herself of the sense of guilt that follows the death of her husband, the fact that such trials are rarely given to widowers in Nigeria, indicates that, it serves a different purpose. As many writers on the issue have indicated, it is usually a pretext for affecting the disinheritance of widows in Nigeria by the men's families. Even in those instances in which the dead man's relations allocate some of his resources for the upkeep of his children, the tendency has been to discriminate against his female children especially as regards schooling.

More so, during the confinement of widows, they are exposed to unhygienic conditions. They do not take their bath, they sleep on mat, they use one set of clothe and scrap their hair. All these practices are injurious to the health of the victims. They are also very strenuous and could lead to the breakdown of the victims (widows). At this point, a question comes to the fore- why are widowers not subjected to all these in honour of their late wives? The tendency in contemporary Nigeria has been for men to claim that the mourning rites are to protect the widows from being "haunted" by the late husband's spirit, as discussed earlier. The majority of affected widows report that they acquiesce to these rites mainly to demonstrate their non-complicity in their husbands' death and to ensure continued acceptance by their husbands' relatives so as not to be neglected.

Although, there are indications that widows' maltreatment and impoverishment in contemporary Nigeria is a function of how empowered educationally and economically the women affected are, as well as of their age and rural/urban location. The reality remains however that the majority of Nigerian women do not possess access to or have control over resources like finance and education that would make them less vulnerable to maltreatment and impoverishment should their husbands die. The socio-cultural conditions that make widowhood such a terrible experience for many women in Nigeria do so because of the structural disadvantage that women suffer from not having access to productive resources and this has impacted negatively on their self-esteem which is made manifest in their lack of will to rise against the violation of their fundamental

human rights. Majority of Nigerian women are poorly educated, concentrated in low-earning economic pre-occupations and their views are unrepresented at decision making levels. The dependency of women on men is a key part of the explanation for women's vulnerability to the violation of their fundamental human rights within and outside of the family.

V. DATA PRESENTATION

A total number of 150 questionnaires were distributed in the three local governments that were randomly sampled local governments. 100 completed questionnaires were returned and used for analysis. This is due to constraint of time and other logistic problems like misplacement of questionnaires by the respondents, uncompleted questionnaires and reluctance of some respondents because of fear of exposing their in-laws. The analysis is thus based on the information derived from the 100 completed questionnaires. The personal data of the respondents are presented and discussed below.

5.1. Personal Data Of Respondents

Table 1. Local Government Area Of Respondents

Local Government Area	Distribution	Percentage
Ado-Ekiti	46	46
Ikere-Ekiti	30	30
Ido/Osi	24	24
Total	100	100

Three local governments were sampled from the three senatorial Districts of the state. From Ado-Ekiti local government, 46 questionnaires were filled and returned; 30 were filled and returned from Ikere-Ekiti local government while 24 were filled and returned from Ido/Osi local government.

Table 2. Age of Respondents

Age-group	Distribution	Percentage
Under 30 years	10	10
31- 45 years	15	15
46- 55 years	40	40
56 years and above	35	35
Total	100	100

TABLE 2 shows that 10% of the widows are under 30 years, 15% are between ages of 31 and 35; while 40% are between ages 46 and 55 and 35% of the respondents are above 56 years of age.

TABLE 3 Occupations of Respondents

Occupation	Distribution	Percentage
Trading	20	20
Civil Servant	10	10
Artisan	9	9
Unemployed	40	40
Farming	20	20
Schooling	1	1
Total	100	100

TABLE 3 above also shows that 20% of the respondents are traders, 10% are civil servants; 9% are artisans while 40% are unemployed, 20% are farmers and 1% is schooling.

TABLE 4. Educational Level of Respondents

Education	Distribution	Percentage
Primary 6 & below	48	48
Modern 3 & Form 4	20	20
WASC & Grade 2	18	18
OND & NCE	10	10
HND University Degree	4	4
Total	100	100

The educational level shows that majority are illiterates because 48% of the respondents fall in the Primary Six and below. 20% falls between Modern School and Form Four, 18% falls between WASC and Grade 2; 10% are in the category of OND and NCE while 4% are in the category of HND and University Degree.

Table 5. Duration Of Marriage

Duration	Distribution	Percentage
Below 10 years	12	12
10- 20 years	16	16
21- 30 years	48	48
30 and above	24	24
Total	100	100

TABLE 5 reveals duration of marriage thus- 12% spent less than 10 years with their husbands before their demise, 16% became widowed between 10 and 20 years of their marriage; while 48% spent between 21 and 30 years with their husbands and 24% spent 30 years and above before they were widowed.

Table 6. No Of Children Of Respondents

No of children	Distribution	Percentage
Nil	5	5
1-4	62	62
5 & above	33	33
Total	100	100

On the number of children, majority of the respondents have between 1 and 4 children, which is 62% of the respondents while 5% declared that they are childless. However, 33% had 5 children and above.

6.2 Data Analysis

In this section, the responses of respondents to questions on their overall condition during the period of mourning the death of their husbands, the widowhood rites they passed through and how these affected their fundamental human rights shall be presented.

Table 7 Duration Of Widowhood

Duration	No of Respondents	Percentage
1-5 years	20	20
6- 10 years	64	64
Above 10 years	16	16
Total	100	100

According to the respondents, the period of widowhood varies between 1 year and 30 years. For the purpose of this study, their responses are categorized into three groups. 20% of the respondents were widowed between the period of one year and five years, 64% were widowed between the period of six and ten years while only 16% falls into the category of ten years and above.

Table 8. Type Of Marriage

Types of marriage	No of Respondents	Percentage
Customary	54	54
Statutory	15	15
Both	31	31
Total	100	100

TABLE 8 shows that majority of the respondents, which is 54% went through customary marriage alone and 15% had statutory marriage while 31% had both types of marriage.

Table 9. Period Of Mourning

Period	No of Respondents	Percentage
3 months	10	10
7 months	18	18
1 year	72	72
Total	100	100

From TABLE 9 above 10% of the respondents mourned for the death of their husbands for 3 months, 18% mourned for 7 months while majority of the respondents mourned for one year.

Table 10. Permission To Work During Mourning Period

Permitted	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	30	30
No	70	70
Total	100	100

TABLE 10 indicates that 30% of the respondents were allowed to work during the period of mourning. This 30% falls within the few that are educated and engaged in salary job while the remaining 70% that were not allowed are those with less education or those who are not educated at all, thus, establishing a relationship between education and the entrenchment of fundamental human rights.

Table 11. Sources Of Support

Sources	No of Respondents	Percentage
In-laws	9	9
Self	52	52
Children	20	20
Parents	7	7
Self & In-laws	12	12
Total	100	100

From TABLE 11, it is seen that only 9% of the respondents received support from their in-laws; 52% were responsible for their up-keep and that of their children; 20% were taken care of by their children while 7% were assisted by their parents and 12% were responsible for their upkeep together with their in-laws.

Table 12. Types of Support

Types	No of Respondents	Percentage
Moral	48	48
Financial	20	20
Moral & Financial	32	32
None	-	-
Total	100	100

From TABLE 12, 48% of the respondents received only moral support; 20% received financial support, while moral and financial support were received by 32% and none of the respondents received no support. This may be due largely to the culture of the society that made people to sympathise with others whenever they are bereaved.

Table 13. Types of Widowhood Rites Undergone

Types	No of Respondents	Percentage
Staying in-doors	100	100
Shaving of hair	50	50
Wearing of black clothe	80	80
Oath taking	10	10
Wailing at particular period	-	-
Marriage to deceased husband's brother	12	12

It is seen from TABLE 13 that all the respondents passed through more than one widowhood rites. All the respondents had a period of staying indoors to mourn the death of their husbands. 50% of the total respondents had their hair shaved; 80% of the respondents wore black clothe, 10% was involved in oath taking and none had a particular wailing period. 12% got married to their deceased husbands' brothers.

Table 14. Reasons For Undergoing Widowhood Rites

Reasons	No of Respondents	Percentage
Cultural	45	45
Emotional	8	8
Children's Security	35	35
Honour to late husband	12	12
Total	100	100

TABLE 14 indicates that 45% of the respondents went through the widowhood rites because the culture demands it; 8% did this because of emotional reason; 35% of the respondents observed the rites because of the security of their children and 12% observed the rites in honour of their late husbands.

Table 15. Reaction To The Rites

Reactions	No of Respondents	Percentage
Good	20	20
Bad	65	65
Neutral	15	15
Total	100	100

TABLE 15 shows that only 20% of the respondents felt good about the widowhood rites they were made to undergo while 65% felt bad about the various rites and 15% were neutral.

The number of widows who had remarried outside their late husband's families was also counted. Only 6 out of the 100 respondents had actually remarried while 12 of the respondents were inherited by their late husbands' brothers. Furthermore, only 20 out of the respondents indicated that their income were adequate to sustain their families.

On the question of relationship with their husbands before death, 80% reported that they had very intimate relationship with their husbands; 12% intimate, 18% cordial and 10% strained. A close look at the respondents with strained relationship with their husbands revealed that 5 of them took oath to vindicate that they were not responsible for the death of their husbands and they all had strained relationship with their in-laws before and after their husbands' death.

Comparison of the relationship of the respondents with the in-laws before and after their husbands' death revealed that majority of the respondents have good and fair relationship before the death of their husbands. However, the relationship was hostile and strained for (60%) during and after the mourning of their late husbands' death; 25% enjoyed fair relationship while the rest (15%) could not describe the level of relationship after the demise of their husbands.

The majority of the respondents (62%) reported that their standard of living fell after the demise of their husbands. Only 20% said their income is adequate to maintain themselves and their children while the remaining 18% live on charity.

Table 16. Level of Education of In-Laws

Level	No of Respondents	Percentage
High	10	10
Average	25	25
Low	45	45
Uneducated	20	20
Total	100	100

TABLE 16 above shows that 10% of the respondents have in-laws who are highly educated; the level of education of in-laws that is average is 25%; while 45% of the respondents' in-laws also have a low level of education and 20% were uneducated. It is noted in the study that the 10% of the respondents who were made to take oath and the 12% who were inherited by their late husbands' brothers fall into the category of those whose in-laws are uneducated and those with low level of education.

Moreover, it is discovered that children's welfare is a major source of anxiety among widows. It is seen that children's education, discipline, feeding and future had the highest number of responses, while finance is next. This shows that widows are more anxious about what become of their children (who they believe are their future) than their own welfare, This further explains the reason why they undergo the dehumanizing widowhood rites, which violate their rights, in the name of protecting or securing their children in their fathers' houses,

Moreover, this provides the reason why many widows do not want to take their in-laws to the law court when their rights are being violated at will.

Furthermore, only few (10%) exhibit anxiety about re-marriage or relationship with men, while 60% of the total respondents had anxiety over their relationship with their in-laws which reveals that the death of a man at times leads to strained relationship between the widow and her in-laws. The reason for this is not far-fetched, it is not unconnected with the obnoxious and harmful rites that the widow is made to observe against her wish.

6.3 Discussion

This study was designed to investigate widowhood rites in Ekiti State, Nigeria and implication for women's fundamental human rights. It is discovered in the study that a good percentage(70%) of the widows (TABLE 10) were not allowed to work during the mourning period which contribute to the fall in their level of income and which invariably affect their standard of living. A good percentage(52%) (TABLE 11) of widows was even responsible for their economic well-being and that of their children. They had to do extra work to maintain their families after the demise of their husbands who were the breadwinners of their families. It is only a small percentage (TABLE 11) of the widows that received financial support from their parents (7%), in-laws (9%) and from their children (20%). This was traditionally not supposed to be according to an informant who said it was the responsibility of the eldest son in the family to take care of the widow of the deceased particularly during their confinement until they are allotted to their inheritors.

The situation of widows today has become terrible because of the fact that widows wanted to dissociate themselves from the culture of 'widow inheritance'. This is the position of the majority of those interviewed because they see "widow inheritance" as a form of social and economic security for widows and their children thus, in their view they (widows) are losing this by their refusal to be inherited by their late husbands' male relatives. One of the elders explains:

These widowhood rites had been with us from ancient times and there should be a strict adherence to our cultural values. We should not imbibe western values at the expense of ours. Discarding our cultural values would lead to confusion than it is made to solve, (Alabi, 2011).

The fact that most of the women had to do extra work may lead to greater stress among the women who have to cope with the volume of work at home and in their places of work. This also explains the reason why they cannot fight for the entrenchment of their basic fundamental human rights when they are eventually violated because of the fear of the wrath of in-laws and inability to pay the legal fees coupled with the societal stigma that will be placed on any woman who takes her in-laws to court.

It is also clear from TABLE 9 that all of the respondents mourn for the death of their husbands between three months and one year in which their movements were restricted to their immediate environments. It is almost a taboo to walk beyond that environment which by implication is a violation of their right to freedom of movement as entrenched in the Nigerian constitution. Their right to livelihood was also violated and is clearly seen in TABLE 10 since majority of the widows representing 70% were not allowed to work during the mourning period and thereby, reducing drastically their means of livelihood. Only 30% were allowed to work. This fall within the people that were engaged in salary job; therefore establishing a relationship between women's education and the entrenchment of their fundamental human rights.

Re-marriage that was believed to be one of the factors that reduces economic hardship of widows was found to have occurred only in a very small percentage of the widows questioned (6%). In the same vein, the percentage of widows who were inherited by their late husbands' brothers is very small. Thus, the social practice of in-laws supporting widows through marriage to younger brothers of the deceased seems to have faded away with western education, urbanisation and enlightenment but the fact still remains that the few who were inherited against their will had their right to freedom of association violated.

Moreover, it is evident from the study that all the widows were subjected to more than one widowhood rites. Two of these rites that were commonly observed by the widows are staying in-door and wearing of black cloth. Many of the widows also got their hair shaved while a small percentage went through oath-taking which further worsened the strained relationship they had with their in-laws and a few of them were inherited by their late husbands' brothers.

The study shows that a good percentage (65%) of the widows (TABLE 15) felt bad about these widowhood rites but they had to undergo them, even though they violate their fundamental human rights, because of the cultural significance attached to them and for their children's security and acceptance in their late husbands' families.

The study also reveals that many of the widows had strained relationships with their in-laws after the demise of their husbands. Some of them mentioned relationships with in-laws as one of their sources of anxiety. From the study, a small percentage of the respondents who are educated and enlightened have a fair relationship

with their in-laws, which made them to experience less of the problems encountered by their less-educated counterparts.

Also, widows whose in-laws are illiterates suffered more in the hands of their in-laws because they hide under the guise of promoting the culture to dehumanise the widows. The respondents who were forced to take oath reported that their in-laws were illiterates therefore, establishing the relationship between education and fundamental human rights viz a viz widowhood.

From the above, it is evident that widows in Ekiti State go through stress from dehumanising widowhood rites, economic hardship and welfare of children to antagonistic in-laws. It also follows from the above that the various widowhood rites are gross violation of the basic fundamental human rights of widows since they are not free to wear whichever clothes they desire coupled with their staying in-door and hair-shaving which is an indication of dehumanisation because their rights to human dignity, freedom of choice, movement and association were violated.

VI. CONCLUSION

In short, Nigerian widows suffer from all the obnoxious practices discussed because they are women living in a male-centred and male-dominated society. This is why their late husbands' relatives violate their fundamental human rights at will and the female sex is given little or no attention, regarding their rights, potentials and development. Although generalisation of results of this study is limited by its scope, the study nonetheless is a major contribution to existing works on gender and development; it also creates awareness of the problems associated with widowhood with particular reference to their human rights and engenders the understanding of these rights and therefore, causes the widows to defend these rights whenever they are violated. Thus, based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested.

Widows should desist from seeing themselves as unfortunate and inferior in the society and women should condemn and never subscribe to these dehumanising widowhood practices. It is high time that widows know their rights and how to go about enforcing them instead of wallowing in self-pity. There is the need for NGOs to intensify their efforts at increasing awareness in local communities, working with traditional authorities and community leaders to educate and reach the mass of the people on the violation of widows' rights in the name of widowhood rites. Also, the communities need to empower the girl-child by allowing her to have access to education, information and skills-acquisition. Religious organisations should assist widows(members) during and after the demise of their husbands and should continue to preach equality between both sexes so that women will not be treated as slaves. Men should endeavour to empower their wives so that they will not be totally dependent on their estates for survival after their demise. Full-time housewives should be discouraged. Men should also prepare their wills to cater for the interest of their wives, children and members of their families before their death and in-laws should allow the wills to prevail. Priorities should also be given to widows in the provision of employment opportunities by government and women should be provided with economic opportunities so they will not be too dependent on their husbands, as this will ensure women's advancement.

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