

## **ADJUSTMENT STRATEGIES OF WIDOWS TO WIDOWHOOD STRESS BASED ON THEIR AGE: THE CASE OF RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA**

**Dr. (Mrs.) Betty-Ruth Ngozi Iruloh and Williams Elsie**

Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance & Counselling, University of Port Harcourt, Choba, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study was aimed at investigating influence of age on adjustment strategies employed by widows in coping with widowhood stress in Rivers State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Two research questions and one hypothesis guided the conduct of the study at 0.05 probability level. A sample of 370 widows in Rivers State was drawn from the population via proportional stratified random sampling technique. Two instruments namely; Stress Level Scale for Widows (SLSW) and Questionnaire for Widows Adjustment Strategies (QWAS), both developed by the researcher were used for data collection. Data were analysed with mean, standard deviation and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance and the statistical package known as SPSS for widows was employed for the analyses. Results showed that; all the eight adjustment strategies (problem solving, cognitive restructuring, express emotion, social support, problem avoidance, wishful thinking, self-criticism and social withdrawal) are adopted by widows in ameliorating widowhood stress; there are slight differences among the mean values of the different age groups with regards to all the adjustment strategies of widows to widowhood stress. Based on the findings of this study, recommendations were made accordingly.*

**KEYWORDS:** Adjustment, Strategies, Widowhood, Stress, Age, Rivers State

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Widows are bound to experience various dimensions of stress, which invariably constitute stress level in their lives. For example, lack of necessary emotional support and financial assistance at an age when their earning power is gradually on the decline is a source of stress for widows, thus Abdulsalam (2005) exclaimed, ‘how do widows cope with life in a society which is ordinarily cruel to the “weaker sex”?’.

Stress has been defined as the body’s and mind’s way of meeting a challenge. Stress leads to a build-up of tension that if not relieved, can cause anxiety-a fear of what might happen even when no threat exists (Missouri Advisory, Council for Comprehensive Psychiatric Services, 2003). The symptoms and resultant effects of stress for the individual and by extension larger society are many. For instance it has been established that the disappointment or frustration that causes stress also can lead to depression, a serious mental illness characterized by fatigue, insomnia, boredom, restlessness, lack of interest in life, and withdrawal which if left untreated can lead to feelings of unworthiness, isolation and even suicide. Oniye (2000) viewed stress as the state of being, manifested by an individual (especially widows), as a result of perceived inability to cope with demands of living or other life situations following the death of a spouse.

In addition, stress or life stress could manifest itself in psychological, physiological or behavioural symptoms. Thus, with reference to widows and widowhood, stress could imply

any life situation, event or demand that appears threatening or beyond their innate resources be it intellectual, emotional and socio-economic ability or resources. Also, it has been observed that among the causes of stress for people, is the incidence of having too much or too little responsibilities, whether for people or things. Thus a widow with too much or too little responsibilities could become stressed, especially if the new situation looks tasking or challenging to her or appear to be beyond her resource out rightly (Cooper, 2001). Accordingly, widowhood stress in the light of this research can be described as life situations, events and demands that appear threatening and beyond the innate resources of a widow (a woman whose husband had died and she has not remarried) be it intellectual, emotional and socio-economic resources.

However, the factors likely to engender stress in an individual are mainly personal because different people react differently to different stimuli depending on their generic and environmental influences. Specifically, stress as it relates to widowhood is believed to be caused by a number of factors such as the uniqueness of the husband-wife relationship, culture aggravated stigma that the widow is instrumental to the death of her husband, in-laws negative actions and inactions, care for the children if any and the host of others. Nevertheless, some widows as observed by the researcher can cope with widowhood stress while some others are challenged. This clearly raises the question of the adjustment strategies adopted by widows' to cope with widowhood stress.

The development of useful adjustment strategies has been found to be dependent on certain factors like the age of the widow or length of marriage, her religious background or inclination, ethnic group, social-economic status and level of educational attainment among others. Adjustment strategies have been described as an individual's coping strategies, behaviours, which are consciously used by an individual (e.g. widow) to handle or control the effects of anticipated or experienced stressful situations.

Adjustment or coping strategies for the management of any kind of stress are quite replete in literature. Some of the strategies include: controlling adrenalin arousal, self-talk, attention diversion strategy, insensitivity technique, relaxation, transcendental meditation, biofeedback, stress diary, sleeping technique, laughing technique, crying technique, gentle behaviour technique, positive thinking, problem solving strategy, confrontive coping strategy, social support strategy, assertive strategy, prevention strategy, calmness, body exercise, cognitive restructuring strategy, express emotion, wishful thinking, self criticism, social withdrawal strategy, problem avoidance strategy, faith strategy, group discussion technique, seeking counsellor's help and the host of others.

Nevertheless, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) had earlier stressed that people attend to or cope with their stress in two different dimensions namely; problem focused coping and emotion focused coping. According to Lazarus and Folkman, the problem focused coping is the strategy that is directed towards solving the problem that cause stress while, the emotion focused coping is the strategy that attends to the feelings or emotions of stress rather than the source (stressor) itself.

Research findings have shown that a number of factors combine in one way or the other to influence the use and benefit derivable from various adjustment strategies. These factors include income, attitude towards present living situation, perceived health status and presence of a confidant (Tate, 2001). In the views of Stroebe and Stroebe (2007), factors likely to influence a widow's adjustment to bereavement stress include age of the widow, her religious

inclination and socio-economic status, number of siblings and support from children and their families.

Nonetheless, studies have shown that there is significant relationship between bereaved people (widow's especially) participation in Bereavement Support Groups (BSGS) and their subsequent adjustment to bereavement. In Nigeria, we have associations with widow's adjustment as their main or part of their focus and they include Widowed Groups of Nigeria (WGN), Widow Organization International (WOI), Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN) and National Council of Women Societies (NCWS). According to Lieberman and Sherman (2009), positive change occurred only among widows who have participated actively in the programmes of self-help groups.

Essentially, a number of works have been carried out on nature of widowhood and plight of widows within and outside Nigeria. Bala (2015) investigated the plight and adjustment strategies of widows in Danko Wasagu local government area of Kebbi state. The target population for the study was widows in four selected areas of Danko Wasagu local government area of Kebbi State (that is, Ribah, Danko, Yar'ali and Rambo). Purposive sampling technique was employed for selecting a sample of 500 respondents. The research instrument used was tagged "Problems and Adjustment Needs of Widows Questionnaire (PANWQ)". It was developed by the researcher to collect relevant information from the respondents. Data collected were analyzed using frequencies and percentage. The main findings of the study showed that psychological problems were the most serious for widows in Danko Wasagu local government area of Kebbi state. The results showed that economic problems and social problems have an effect on the adjustment strategies of widows. Based on the findings, it was recommended that widows should be provided with work opportunities to help them establish small enterprises and train them to manage these projects. It was also suggested that higher education should be obtained by widows through counseling services and lastly counselors should try to counsel married men to write their wills and make their wives and children as their next of kin in order to avoid these problems that were found to be faced by widows.

Uche (2015) sought to determine the extent of adjustment among widows in Bayelsa State. The ex-post facto design was used and a sample size of 200 was derived through probability sampling technique. Two hypotheses were formulated and data collected using questionnaire were analysed using Independent t-test. Results revealed that widowhood adjustment significantly differed on the bases of Spirituality and Age. It was concluded that adjustment tend to be easier for widows of higher spiritual level and those who are older. It was recommended for counsellors to be aware of the spiritual and other issues in their widow clients' lives and assist them to capitalize on these areas of strengths.

Mathias, Jacob and Shivakumara (2014) investigated the psycho-social adjustments faced by young widows. Descriptive survey design with 100 widows was selected from Mangalore district through purposive sampling. A 3-point scale to assess the Psycho-social adjustments was developed with 35 items. The tool was given to seven experts for the content validation. Reliability of the tool was established by using Cronbach Alpha ( $r = 0.75$ ). The tool was translated into Kannada. Furthermore, the collected data were analyzed by using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings showed that 69% of the young widows have average adjustment and 31% have poor adjustments. Occupation and living with children had significant association with psycho-social problems among young widows. In conclusion, it was recommended that assessing the psycho-social problems among young widows will help to develop strategic welfare schemes to young widows, an area totally neglected by our society.

Akinlabi (2013) examined the differences that existed between young and old widows and their amenability to coping mechanism and resources. The researcher made use of descriptive research design of the survey type. All the widows in South West Nigeria were surveyed. A self-designed instrument titled 'Young and Old Vulnerable Widows Questionnaire' (YO VWQ) was administered on randomly selected widows. A sample of one hundred young and old widows was randomly selected using multistage sampling technique involving stratified and purposive sampling techniques. The instruments validity was ensured facially, content-wise and construct-wise by subjecting it to relevant experts. A reliability co-efficient of 0.78 was obtained from Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis using test retest reliability method. Copies of the instrument were personally administered by the researcher and trained research assistants in the various locations of the respondents. The data generated were analysed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics. The analysis of the data revealed that respondents (old and young) widows did not differ in their coping strategies and mechanisms. Based on the findings curriculum planner should incorporate into the national curriculum areas to be taught to students that will change orientation and reduce agonies of mourning widows. Also the culture of Will writing should be incorporated to couples life to alleviate the agonies of widows.

In the same year, Akinlabi (2013) investigated the influence of length of marriage on grief experience of widows in Yoruba land, Nigeria. The study adopted descriptive research design of the survey type. A self-designed instrument titled 'Widowhood Experience Questionnaire; (WEQ) was used for gathering data from the widows. One thousand, five hundred and sixteen (1,516) respondents were chosen using multistage sampling technique. The validity of the instrument was done by experts in Guidance and Counselling, Test and Measurement and Human Kinetics. The test retest reliability of the instrument yielded 0.78 reliability coefficient using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis and found significant at 0.05 levels. The data generated from the responses was analysed using frequency counts percentages and t-test. The result showed that respondents (old and young widows) don't differ in their experience of grief. Based on the findings, it was recommended that caregivers, teachers and counsellors should be equipped with the tools of handling widows in Yoruba land. The religious leaders should preach and discourage areas of Yoruba culture that elongates grief experience. The area of the culture that promotes tenacity of grief should be discouraged.

Amaru (2012), conducted a research on counseling needs of widows in Rivers state; implication for counseling. The sample size used in the study was 2000 widows from Rivers state. The study showed that when a woman loses her husband, the relatives of the husband deny her the inheritance she should have gotten from the late husband. She is accused of having a hand in the death of her husband and made to pass through agonizing rituals to prove her innocence. In such situations, widows tend to suffer a lot of the loss of a partner, and this has socio-economic and health implications for the widows. They are at tremendous risk of physical and several abuses. It was shown that widows in Rivers state are undergoing storms of economic deprivations or distress, dehumanizing physiological and mental torture counseling needs of the widows in Rivers state is characterized by all forms of physical, economical, psychological and emotional counseling activities to help the widows to understand their new situation and consequently make adjustment. The study identified some counseling needs of widows in Rivers state area of Nigeria such as economic, psychological, socio-cultural and educational practice counselors and psychologists should rely on economic, psychological, social-cultural level to render her counseling needs to the widows in Rivers state. Further result showed that young and elderly widows have equal tendencies of

involvement in the counseling services in Rivers state since both age, was found to have equal counseling needs in the study.

Kayode (2011) conducted a research on the problems associated with widows as expressed by widows in Ilorin metropolis. 108 widows were used for that study, from the survey carried out it was shown that the negative attitude of the extended family to the widows in the society cannot be over emphasized. The study showed that the concern of the family immediately after the internment of the deceased is how the property of the late husband will be shared among them without due consideration for the welfare of both the widow and her children. The finding of the study also showed that widows are branded as devils, who master-minded the death of their husband and at end of the day they may be frustrated out of their matrimonial homes to move away for easy acquisition of deceased property. The study also stated that national council of women society have not made any meaningful impact said of the religions bodies and their weakly individual in the society he said it is as a result of the fact that most of this organizations are political in nature and they are devoid of welfare policy for the less fortunate members of the society. Although most of the religious bodies tend to follow the function of Holy books in the area of assisting the widows in their midst, however such assistance are grossly inadequate.

However, from the findings of Kayode (2011), he concluded that widows in Ilorin metropolis do have financial or economic problems as they are face alone with meeting the financial need of the children e.g. not able to hold birthday parties as usual, inability to buy new clothes, feed well, pay children's school fees etc. it is also shown in his finding that widows do have family relationship problems as they find it difficult to confide in husband's house relation due to insult being received from her or their in-laws.

Ushe (2011) also conducted a study on the plight of widows in Nigeria: the paradox for traditional counseling of the bereaved. In his study the Historical studies showed that widowhood in pre-Christian and Islamic periods were a natural phenomenon which carries with the risk of conjugal bereavement due to the death of one spouse. However, the situation changed immediately the society started subjecting widows into various tortures and mistreatments (especially from 1970s), leading to distrust amongst families and eventually violence amongst the people.

The study, therefore examined the plight of widows in Nigeria as a paradox for traditional counseling of the bereaved in pre-colonial times and the Nigerian situations today. In the study it showed that in Nigeria today, the plight of widows' rages from immediate relatives and families of deceased husband to members of his community. Many widows are suspected by family members of deceased spouse for been responsible or the death of the departed husbands'. When the death is sudden and without any sign of protracted illness, it is believed that such death might have been caused by the wife, who is the ghost associate. The findings of the study showed that many widows who suffered such plights are likely to experience psychic and emotional breakdown. Furthermore it was also shown that, it is clear that widowhood is a bitter experience not only in the Nigeria society but in the globally system, which creates a state of mind and behavioural characteristic that can be measured and known within the socio-economic structure and adjustment system. The prevailing socio-economic conditions with very demanding finances makes Nigerian widows to find it difficult to adjust mentally and socially in modern times. The study also indicated that the problem of widows in Nigerian society can best be interpreted in relation to the socio-economic structure rather than

concentrating on individual treatment of widows. A widow needs care and financial assistance but unfortunately, the supports given to them are mostly in terms of moral aspects.

In the study it was, concluded that negative attitude of most Nigerian communities towards widows needs re-orientation and cultural integration. The introductions of social and religious programmes are necessary in this regards. Thus, traditional way of helping the bereaved to adjust economically and socially would serve as a departure from other counseling services operating in Nigerian society which yield marginal impacts on the lives of the bereaved in contemporary times.

Suleiman (2010) conducted a study on the problems and adjustment needs of literate widows in kwara state. The study examined the problems encountered by widows and the adjustment needs of widows on the basis of age when married, bereavement period, religion, type of family, type of job and highest educational qualification. The target population used in that study was literate widows in three senatorial districts of kwara state. Purposive sampling technique was employed for selecting a sample of 400 respondents for the study. The research instrument used was tagged “problems and Adjustment Needs of Widows Questionnaire” (PANWQ). Generally, it was discovered in the study that widows in kwara state have acute problem and adjustment needs. The main findings of the study showed that psychological problems are the most serious or commonest problem confronting widows. It involved feeling of sadness on remembrance of their later husbands, followed by financial problems, social and then health problems. Suleiman also indicated in his finding that widow needs adjustment in all area of their lives that is in the area of social, health, financial and psychological issues. The finding also revealed that significant differences were found on the basis of age when married, type of family, type of job and highest educational qualifications. However, on the basis of length of bereavement and religion no significant difference was found in the problems encountered by widows.

Elegbeleye and Oyedeji (2003) investigated the perception of death by the bereaved, the process of mourning and grief, the psychological and social malfunctioning which arise as a result of bereavement and the process of ‘grief work’ and the coping ability displayed by various victims of bereavement, particularly widow/ers. The study employed the instrumentation of quantitative and qualitative research strategy to gather relevant data from the study. The data were analysed using the appropriate statistical methods. Results obtained from the research study revealed major findings in support of the psychological and social dysfunctions that arise as a result of the loss of a spouse, but no significant difference existed between the coping strategies adopted by both middle aged and old aged widows. However a significant difference existed in the coping abilities of the middle age and old age widow/ers. Similarly, a significant gender variation was recorded in the coping abilities of the old age widow/ers. Widow/ers did express conviction that the coping strategy adopted by them actually worked and were therefore considered effective.

Oniye (2001) conducted a research on the adjustment strategies of Nigeria widows to widowhood stress; issue for rehabilitation counseling. The research investigated into the adjustment strategies of Nigerian widows as they strive to overcome the stress inherent in our society’s widowhood practice. Eight hundred and six five (865) widows were purposefully sampled from the three main ethnic groups in Nigeria, i.e., Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. The problems stated in the study showed that widowhood affects more women than men financially, psychologically and socially. Our traditional socialization which emphasizes dependence and passivity hinder women’s attempts to adjust to widowhood and crate new life for themselves

the main focus of the study was to examine the adjustment strategies often employed by Nigerian widows towards widowhood stress. The research design adopted for that study was the descriptive survey method. The instruments used in the study were the Stress Rating Scale for widows (SRSW) and Widows Adjustment Strategies Questionnaire (WASQ) developed by the researcher.

The result of the investigation revealed that five broad categories of adjustment strategies were acknowledged by Nigerian widows. Majority of Nigerian widows (218 = 59.9%) reported experiencing stress at medium level; 258 (29.85%) and 89 (10.35%) confirmed experiencing stress at low and high levels respectively. It was discovered that Nigerian widows differ significantly in their stress level and adjustment strategies on the bases of selected personality variables. It was recommended among other things that relatives, society, government and counselor should mount intervention strategies like abolition of injurious widowhood practices, legislation against oppressive mourning and widowhood rites and establishment of National commission for widow's affair. It was also recommended in the paper that rehabilitation counselling should be provided by counselors. This should include re-orienting the widows' cognition about their state of being and its attendant stress. The rehabilitation counselling advocated should focus at restoring total personality well being of the widows and maximization of their potentials for optimal integration into the larger society.

Consequently, it can be observed from the studies presented earlier that none of them *per se* concentrated mainly on the adjustment strategies of widows. In addition, the researcher has not found any particular work that has been conducted on the adjustment strategies of widows to widowhood stress in Rivers State, with data supplied by widows themselves and this created a gap, yearning to be filled. Accordingly, it is against this background that the researcher deemed it fit to embark on this scholarly venture with the main thrust of identifying the adjustment strategies of widows towards widowhood stress based on their age.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Descriptive survey was adopted for the study. The population for the study consisted of widows in Rivers State, particularly, widows of the land of three major ethnic groups of Rivers State (i.e. Ikwerre, Kalabari and Ogoni). These three ethnic groups are found in 11 local government Areas of the 23 Local Government Areas (LGA) of the state. Nevertheless, as at the time of the study, the estimated population of widows in the 11 LGAs as reported by the Social Welfare Office of the State Ministry of Women Affairs is 3700, (Rivers State Ministry of Women Affairs, 2016).

A sample of 370 widows (10% of the official population size of 3700) was selected for the study through proportional stratified random sampling technique. Two instruments were used for data gathering in this study namely; Stress Level Scale for Widows (SLSW) and Questionnaire for Widows Adjustment Strategies (QWAS), both developed by the researcher. The first instrument, SLSW was made up of two parts i.e. sections A and B. While section A sought demographic information such as age, and highest educational level, section B consisted of 15 items meant to assess widowhood stress in the areas of socio-psychological stressors, financial stressors, health and emotional stressors and authority and responsibility stressors. The response format for the SLSW was a four point response format of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4points, Agree (A) = 3points, Disagree (D) = 2points and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1point.

The maximum and minimum point obtainable from the SLSW was 60points and 15points respectively.

The second questionnaire that is; Questionnaire for Widows Adjustment Strategies (QWAS) was a 40 items questionnaire consisting of eight parts i.e. A-H meant to elicit information on widow's adjustment strategies for managing stressful situations, events, circumstances, person or objects. The sub-headings for this particular instrument are: (i) problem solving strategies; (ii) cognitive restructuring strategies; (iii) express emotions strategies; (iv) social support strategies; (v) problem avoidance strategies; (vi) wishful thinking strategies; (vii) self-criticism strategies and (viii) social withdrawal strategies. Each of these parts of the QWAS consists of five items. The response format for the QWAS was a five point response format of Not at all = 1point, A little = 2points, somewhat = 3points, Much = 4points and Very much = 5points. The maximum and minimum point obtainable from the QWAS is 200points and 40points respectively. Data were analysed with mean, standard deviation and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance and the statistical package known as SPSS for widows was employed for the analyses.

### Presentation and Discussion of Findings

**Research Question 1:** What are the adjustment strategies of widows to widowhood stress?

**Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Adjustment Strategies of Widows to Widowhood Stress**

S/N	Adjustment Strategies	N	Mean	SD
1	Self Criticism	370	22.37	3.216
2	Express Emotion	370	22.37	3.006
3	Social Support	370	22.25	3.426
4	Problem Avoidance	370	22.17	3.443
5	Social Withdrawal	370	22.17	3.579
6	Problem Solving	370	22.13	4.067
7	Wishful Thinking	370	21.92	3.700
8	Cognitive Restructuring	370	21.91	3.899

The results in Table 1 showed that the range of the means for the eight adjustment strategies was from 21.91 to 22.37; whereas the standard deviation ranged from 3.006 to 4.067. The close values of the means and the low values of the standard deviations are indications of homogeneity among the respondents. Hence, research findings from these data could be relied upon, and generalizations could be accepted with minimal error.

An examination of Table 1 showed that all eight adjustment strategies were adopted by widows in ameliorating widowhood stress as revealed by the mean values which show no remarkable difference in terms of whole numbers. However, in order of preference, self criticism strategies came first, followed by express emotion; social support; problem avoidance; social withdrawal; problem solving; wishful thinking and cognitive restructuring been the last adjustment strategies.



**Research Question 2:** What is the influence of widows' ages on their adjustment strategies to widowhood stress?

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference in the adjustment strategies of widows to widowhood stress on the basis of their age.

**Table 2: Means and Standard Deviation of Adjustment Strategies of Widows to Widowhood Stress on the basis of Age**

Adjustment Strategies	N	Mean	SD
Problem solving	370	22.13	4.067
20-30years	83	21.33	5.338
31-40years	168	22.68	3.745
41 and above years	119	21.92	3.338
Cognitive restructuring	370	21.91	3.899
20-30years	83	21.66	4.275
31-40years	168	22.26	3.720
41 and above years	119	21.59	3.865
Express emotion	370	22.37	3.006
20-30years	83	22.58	3.482
31-40years	168	22.63	2.783
41 and above years	119	21.86	2.912
Social support	370	22.25	3.426
20-30years	83	21.83	3.960
31-40years	168	22.67	3.216
41 and above years	119	21.96	3.274
Problem avoidance	370	22.17	3.443
20-30years	83	21.48	4.275
31-40years	168	22.72	2.977
41 and above years	119	21.88	3.315
Wishful thinking	370	21.92	3.700
20-30years	83	22.16	3.785
31-40years	168	22.16	3.384
41 and above years	119	21.42	4.035
Self criticism	370	22.37	3.216
20-30years	83	22.41	3.166
31-40years	168	22.58	3.115
41 and above years	119	22.04	3.386
Social withdrawal	370	22.17	3.579
20-30years	83	22.65	3.337
31-40years	168	22.13	3.540
41 and above years	119	21.89	3.788
Total Widows Adjustment	370	177.30	20.972
20-30years	83	176.10	25.426
31-40years	168	179.83	19.056
41 and above years	119	174.55	19.860

**Table 3: Summary of ANOVA of the influence of Age on Adjustment Strategies of Widows to Widowhood Stress**

AS	SV	SS	df	MS	F
Problem solving	Between groups	110.8552	55.427		3.394*
	Within groups	5993.656	367	16.331	
	Total	6104.511	369		
Cognitive restructuring	Between groups	38.203 2	19.101	1.258	
	Within groups	5571.854	367	15.182	
	Total	5610.057	369		
Express emotion	Between groups	45.823 2	22.912	2.557	
	Within groups	3288.187	367	8.960	
	Total	3334.011	369		
Social support	Between groups	54.696 2	27.348	2.346	
	Within groups	4277.423	367	11.655	
	Total	4332.119	369		
Problem avoidance	Between groups	100.0032	50.001		4.293*
	Within groups	4274.927	367	11.648	
	Total	4374.930	369		
Wishful thinking	Between groups	44.111 2	22.055	1.616	
	Within groups	5008.616	367	13.647	
	Total	5052.727	369		
Self criticism	Between groups	20.577 2	10.289	.995	
	Within groups	3795.696	367	10.342	
	Total	3816.273	369		
Social withdrawal	Between groups	28.789 2	14.394	1.124	
	Within groups	4698.822	367	12.803	
	Total	4727.611	369		
Total Widows Adjustment	Between groups	2095.340	2	1047.670	2.400
	Within groups	160194.0	367	436.496	
	Total	162289.3	369		

\*Significant at 0.05 level of significance

Table 2 showed that there were slight differences among the mean values of the different age groups with regards to all the adjustment strategies of widows to widowhood stress. This means that age influences the adjustment strategies of widows to widowhood stress. Nevertheless, on further statistical analysis through the application of analysis of variance the influence of age were found to be significant in problem solving strategies [ $F_{(2,367)} = 3.394$ ] and problem avoidance strategies [ $F_{(2,367)} = 4.293$ ] at 0.05 level significance (Table 3). Therefore, with

regards to these two strategies the null hypothesis was rejected and accepted for the remaining strategies (cognitive restructuring, express emotion, social support, wishful thinking, self criticism and social withdrawal).

The result was that, there is significant difference in the adjustment strategies (problem solving and problem avoidance) of widows to widowhood stress on the basis of their age. Conversely, there was no significant difference in the adjustment strategies (cognitive restructuring, express emotion, social support, wishful thinking, self criticism and social withdrawal, as well as overall adjustment strategies) of widows to widowhood stress on the basis of their age.

Thus given the significant F-values of problem solving strategies and problem avoidance strategies, a detailed multiple comparison analysis using Scheffe analysis was done to determine exactly which group (20-30years; 31-40years; 41 and above) differed significantly from each other in terms of problem solving strategies and problem avoidance strategies among the widows under investigation. The results of these analyses were presented in Table 3.

Examination of Table 4 showed that the significant difference is between widows within the age range 20-30years and 31-40years in both problem solving strategies and problem avoidance strategies. That is the difference in adjustment strategies (problem solving and problem avoidance) of widows to widowhood stress was between these two age ranges but all in favour of widows within the age range of 20-30years.

**Table 4: Summary of Post Hoc Test via Scheffe Analysis**

AS	Age	MD	Std Error	Sig
Problem solving	20-30years Vs 31-40years	-1.359*	.542	.044
	20-30years Vs 41 and above	-.591	.578	.594
	31-40years Vs 41 and above	.769	.484	.285
	Problem avoidance			
Problem avoidance	20-30years Vs 31-40years	-1.238*	.458	.027
	20-30years Vs 41 and above	-.400	.488	.714
	31-40years Vs 41 and above	.838	.409	.124

AS = Adjustment Strategies; MD = Mean Difference

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **Adjustment strategies of widows to widowhood stress**

The finding of this study showed that all the eight adjustment strategies (problem solving, cognitive restructuring, express emotion, social support, problem avoidance, wishful thinking, self criticism and social withdrawal) were adopted by widows in ameliorating widowhood stress. However, in order of preference, self criticism strategies came first, followed by express emotion; social support; problem avoidance; social withdrawal; problem solving; wishful thinking and cognitive restructuring been the last adjustment strategies.

This was indicative of the fact that the adjustment strategies to widowhood stress investigated in the study were all applied by widows in Rivers State irrespective of their age, educational levels, ethnic groups and even their religious affiliation. What was significantly different, like in any phenomenon involving humans, was the degree to which each of these adjustment strategies were applied by the widows. Nevertheless, it was quite surprising to not that self criticism strategies came tops among the strategies used by widows to ameliorate widowhood stress while, cognitive restructuring strategies came least. This could be as a result of the fact that, widows may be blaming their stressful situations on themselves rather than being optimistic by facing their situation head-on. Another, reason for cognitive restructuring strategies coming last and self criticism strategies been first, may be as a result of the cultural believes of the widows that nothing happens naturally something artificial or unnatural may be the course of their predicament (widowhood stress), especially in an African setting.

The above findings are similar to the findings made by Kayode (2011), ushe (2011) and Oniye (2001) who in their separate studies also found out that social support strategy, cognitive restructuring and social withdrawals are some of the common strategies adopted by widows to address problems and stressful situations confronting them. However, due to the scanty nature of literature related to the present study, the researcher could not find works with findings that are in disconcordance with the present findings of this study with regards to adjustment strategies of widows to widowhood stress.

### **Widows' age and their adjustment strategies to widowhood stress**

The result concerning widow's age and their adjustment strategies to widowhood stress indicated that, there were slight differences among the mean values of the different age groups with regards to all the adjustment strategies of widows to widowhood stress. On further statistical analysis there was significant difference in the adjustment strategies (problem solving and problem avoidance) of widows to widowhood stress on the basis of their age. Conversely, there was no significant difference in the adjustment strategies (cognitive restructuring, express emotion, social support, wishful thinking, self criticism and social withdrawal, as well as overall adjustment strategies) of widows to widowhood stress on the basis of their age. Nevertheless, the difference in adjustment strategies (problem solving and problem avoidance) of widows to widowhood stress was between 20-30years and 31-40years ranges but all in favour of widows within the age range of 20-30years. The present result was in agreement with some past research findings. For example, Uche (2015) in a study to determine the extent of adjustment among widows in Bayelsa State, found out that the adjustment strategies adopted by young widows differ significantly from those of middle age widows and even among older widows. Similar results were found in related studies by Mathias, Jacob and Shivakumara (2014), Suleiman (2010) and Elegbeleye and Oyedeji (2003).

However, the studies by Akinlabi (2013) and Amaru (2012) revealed findings inconsistent with the present one. Their results showed that widows (young and old) do not differ significantly in their adjustment or coping strategies or mechanism.

## CONCLUSION

It could be concluded from the findings of this study that:

- (1) All the adjustment strategies (problem solving, cognitive restructuring, express emotion, social support, problem avoidance, wishful thinking self criticism and social withdrawal) investigated in this study are adopted by widows to ameliorate widowhood stress. In addition, self criticism strategies came top while cognitive restructuring strategies came last in the order of strategies adopted by widows.
- (2) Widows in Rivers State differ significantly in their adjustment strategies to widowhood stress on the basis of age

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this work, the following recommendations would be very useful to ameliorate widowhood stress among widows in Rivers State:

- 1) Counsellors could systematically use the adjustment strategies studied in this research to help widows to cope with widowhood stress.
- 2) Apart from the above, bereavement counselling should emphasize the need for widows to acquire skills needed for securing gainful employment either in public/private or personal enterprise. For instance, they should be oriented to appreciate the usefulness of possessing impressive academic qualifications, basic know-how of transacting business, saving for old age and future investment among others.
- 3) Finally, the bereavement counselling to be provided should appropriately orientate young widows towards the imperativeness of remarriage especially for those widowed before the age of thirty five (35years). This is crucial, if their physiological and psychological needs like sexual gratification, provision of emotional support and social support are to be legitimately satisfied.

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