

## **ADJUSTMENT STRATEGIES OF WIDOWS TO WIDOWHOOD STRESS IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study investigated the various 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 alpha levels. A sample of 370 widows in Rivers State was drawn from the population through 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; ethnic group of widows' influences their adjustment strategies to widowhood stress. Based on the findings of this work, three appropriate recommendations were made.*

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

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The death of a spouse is believed to be the most stressful of all events because it may signify the end of a relationship, long or short, the loss of shared history of significant events, the end of a satisfying sexual relationship, the loss of a best friend, trusted companion and in some cases, the bread winner. The death of a life partner may also mean that the surviving spouse will have to assume household responsibilities that were never performed before, such as school runs, car repairs or doing yard work. The situation gets compounded when the death, especially, that of the husband is accompanied by other emotional issues such as hostilities, maltreatment and aggression from in-laws (Olusakin, 2006).

The death of a spouse and the resultant effects are not the same for males and females because widows are more likely to receive injustice and unfair treatment than widowers, from members of their community, in some places in Nigeria (Ahonsi, 2008). The experience of widowhood has been rendered even more traumatic by some of the obnoxious practices carried out in some parts of Africa: widows' subjection to sitting on the bare floor, shaving of her hair with sharp objects, swearing before shrine to prove her innocence in his death and worse of all, drinking the water used in washing the husband's corpse (Ekime, 2009).

Grief is a universal reaction to loss or separation and upon the loss of their husbands, many women become deeply grieved which manifest in a number of behavioural forms, such as, active distress, protest and search for the lost attachment figure (Bowlby, 1982). This state of

separation of the husband of a wife by death that brings about grief confers on the wife the state of widowhood. This is because widowhood is usually associated with intense grief and anger expression, especially among more widows than the divorced when compared together (Kitson & Zynganki, 2007). Buttressing the aforementioned statement, Thomas, Digulio and Shechan (2008) emphasized among others that, this is more common among women in widowhood because of deprivation following loss of spousal intimacy through death. In the opinion of Ambert (2006) apart from divorce, widowhood is the greatest source of psycho-social deprivation for children of female-headed families.

The implication is that 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"?'.

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.

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.

However, for this study eight adjustment strategies were examined and they include problem solving strategy, social support strategy, cognitive restructuring strategy, express emotion, wishful thinking, self criticism, social withdrawal strategy, and problem avoidance strategy. These strategies are a combination of both problem focused strategies and emotion focused strategies.

## **EMPIRICAL REVIEW**

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 i.e. 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.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The design of the study is a descriptive survey. A descriptive survey concerns itself with ascertaining and establishing the status-quo, facts or pieces of information at the time of the research and presenting such facts as they are (Nwankwo, 2013). 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.

## RESULTS

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

To answer the above question, the data collected from the questionnaire were subjected to descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation on the variables that constituted adjustment strategies of widows and are presented in Table 1.

**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 shows 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:** How do the various ethnic groups influence adjustment strategies of widows to widowhood stress?

**Hypothesis 1:** The adjustment strategies of widows to widowhood stress do not significantly differ among various ethnic groups of widows.

To answer this research question and test the corresponding hypothesis, one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) technique was performed on the data obtained with widows' adjustment strategies as the dependent variables and their ethnic group categorization as the independent variables. The results were as presented in Table 2 and Table 3 respectively.

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

Adjustment Strategies	N	Mean	SD
Problem solving			
Ikwerre	101	19.93	4.786
Kalabari	97	23.90	1.461
Ogoni	172	22.43	4.048
Total	370	22.13	4.067
Cognitive restructuring			
Ikwerre	101	19.55	4.533
Kalabari	97	23.57	1.761
Ogoni	172	22.36	3.743
Total	370	21.91	3.899
Express emotion			
Ikwerre	101	21.16	3.890
Kalabari	97	23.24	1.761
Ogoni	172	22.59	2.751
Total	370	22.37	3.006
Social support			
Ikwerre	101	20.64	4.685
Kalabari	97	23.45	1.568
Ogoni	172	22.52	2.949
Total	370	22.25	3.426
Problem avoidance			
Ikwerre	101	20.15	4.146
Kalabari	97	23.54	1.714

	Ogoni	172	22.59	3.199
	Total	370	22.17	3.443
Wishful thinking				
	Ikwerre	101	19.91	4.304
	Kalabari	97	23.40	1.818
	Ogoni	172	22.27	3.621
	Total	370	21.92	3.700
Self criticism				
	Ikwerre	101	20.81	3.901
	Kalabari	97	23.40	1.772
	Ogoni	172	22.70	3.084
	Total	370	22.37	3.216
Social withdrawal				
	Ikwerre	101	20.52	4.807
	Kalabari	97	23.27	1.896
	Ogoni	172	22.51	3.117
	Total	370	22.17	3.579
Total Widows Adjustment				
	Ikwerre	101	162.68	23.201
	Kalabari	97	187.76	7.936
	Ogoni	172	179.98	20.085
	Total	370	177.30	20.972

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

AS	SV	SS	df	MS	F
Problem solving					
	Between groups	806.864	2	403.432	27.948*
	Within groups	5297.647	367	14.435	
	Total	6104.511	369		
Cognitive restructuring					
	Between groups	861.641	2	430.820	33.298*
	Within groups	4748.416	367	12.938	
	Total	5610.057	369		
Express emotion					
	Between groups	229.307	2	114.654	13.553*
	Within groups	3104.704	367	8.460	
	Total	3334.011	369		
Social support					
	Between groups	414.002	2	207.001	19.389*
	Within groups	3918.117	367	10.676	
	Total	4332.119	369		

Problem avoidance	Between groups	624.522	2	312.261	30.557*
	Within groups	3750.408	367	10.219	
	Total	4374.930	369		
Wishful thinking	Between groups	641.512	2	320.756	26.686*
	Within groups	4411.215	367	12.020	
	Total	5052.727	369		
Self criticism	Between groups	367.650	2	183.825	19.563*
	Within groups	3448.623	367	9.397	
	Total	3816.273	369		
Social withdrawal	Between groups	410.415	2	205.208	17.444*
	Within groups	4317.196	367	11.763	
	Total	4727.611	369		
Total Widows Adjustment	Between groups	33429.983	2	16714.991	47.605*
	Within groups	128859.3	367	351.115	
	Total	162289.3	369		

\*Significant at 0.05 level of significance

In Table 2 there were differences among the mean values of the different ethnic groups with regards to all the adjustment strategies of widows to widowhood stress. This means that ethnic group of widows' influence their adjustment strategies to widowhood stress. Nevertheless, on further statistical analysis through the deployment of analysis of variance the influence of ethnic groups were found to be significant in problem solving strategies [ $F_{(2,367)} = 27.948$ ], cognitive restructuring strategies [ $F_{(2,367)} = 33.298$ ], express emotion strategies [ $F_{(2,367)} = 13.553$ ], social support strategies [ $F_{(2,367)} = 19.389$ ], problem avoidance [ $F_{(2, 367)} = 30.557$ ], wishful thinking strategies [ $F_{(2,367)} = 26.686$ ], self criticism [ $F_{(2,367)} = 19.563$ ], social withdrawal [ $F_{(2,367)} = 17.444$ ] and overall adjustment strategies [ $F_{(2,367)} = 47.605$ ] all at 0.05 level significance (Table 3). Therefore, with regards to all these strategies the null hypothesis was rejected. The result was that, the adjustment strategies of widows to widowhood stress do significantly differ among various ethnic groups of widows.

Given the significant F-values, a detailed multiple comparison analysis using Scheffe analysis was done to determine exactly which group (Ikwerre; Kalabari; Ogoni) differed significantly from each other in terms of all the adjustment strategies among the widows under investigation. The results of these analyses were presented in Table 4.

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

AS	EG	MD	Std Error	Sig
Problem solving	Ikwerre Vs Kalabari	-3.966*	.540	.000
	Ikwerre Vs	-2.500*	.476	.000
	Ogoni Kalabari Vs	1.467*	.482	.010
Cognitive restructuring	Ogoni Ikwerre Vs	-4.013*	.511	.000
	Kalabari Ikwerre Vs Ogoni	-2.806*	.451	.000
	Kalabari Vs Ogoni	1.207*	.457	.032
Express emotion	Ikwerre Vs Kalabari	-2.079*	.413	.000
	Ikwerre Vs	-1.429*	.365	.001
	Ogoni Kalabari Vs Ogoni	.650	.369	.214
Social support	Ikwerre Vs Kalabari	-2.810*	.465	.000

	Ikwerre Vs Ogoni	-1.880*	.410	.000
	Vs Ogoni	.930	.415	.082
Problem avoidance	Ikwerre Vs Kalabari	-3.388*	.454	.000
	Ikwerre Vs Ogoni	-2.445*	.401	.000
	Kalabari Vs Ogoni	.943	.406	.069
Wishful thinking	Ikwerre Vs Kalabari	-3.491*	.493	.000
	Ikwerre Vs Ogoni	-2.357*	.435	.000
	Kalabari Vs Ogoni	1.135*	.440	.037
Self criticism	Ikwerre Vs Kalabari	-2.590*	.436	.000
	Ikwerre Vs Ogoni	-1.892*	.384	.000
	Kalabari Vs Ogoni	.699	.389	.201
Social withdrawal	Ikwerre Vs Kalabari	-2.743*	.488	.000

	Ikwerre			
	Vs	-1.987*	.430	.000
	Ogoni			
	Kalabari			
	Vs	.756	.436	.223
	Ogoni			
Total adjustment	Ikwerre			
	Vs	-25.080*	2.664	.000
	Kalabari			
	Ikwerre			
	Vs	-17.294*	2.349	.000
	Ogoni			
	Kalabari			
	Vs	7.786*	2.379	.005
	Ogoni			

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AS = Adjustment Strategies; MD = Mean Difference; EG = Ethnic Group

Examination of Table 4 showed that significant differences exist in all the pairs in problem solving strategies, cognitive restructuring strategies, wishful thinking and overall adjustment strategies in favour of the Kalabari and Ogoni ethnic groups respectively. In the express emotion strategies, social support strategies, problem avoidance strategies, self criticism strategies and social withdrawal strategies, significant differences existed between Ikwerre and Kalabari ethnic group; between Ikwerre and Ogoni ethnic group both in favour also of the Kalabari and Ogoni ethnic groups respectively.

In addition, five of the adjustment strategies (express emotion, social support, problem avoidance, self criticism and social withdrawal) had no significant differences between the Kalabari ethnic group and the Ogoni ethnic group as revealed by their mean values and significant levels in the study. This means that the two ethnic groups of Kalabari and Ogoni ethnic groups were similar as far as the earlier mentioned five adjustment strategies were concerned.

## 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 discordance with the present findings of this study with regards to adjustment strategies of widows to widowhood stress.

### **Ethnic groups of widow's and their adjustment strategies to widowhood stress**

It was found out that ethnic group of widows' influence their adjustment strategies to widowhood stress. On further statistical analysis, the adjustment strategies of widows to widowhood stress do significantly differ among various ethnic groups of widows. Furthermore, significant differences existed in all the pairs in problem solving strategies, cognitive restructuring strategies, wishful thinking and overall adjustment strategies in favour of the Kalabari and Ogoni ethnic groups respectively. In the express emotion strategies, social support strategies, problem avoidance strategies, self criticism strategies and social withdrawal strategies, significant differences existed between Ikwerre and Kalabari ethnic group; between Ikwerre and Ogoni ethnic group both in favour also of the Kalabari and Ogoni ethnic groups respectively. In addition, five of the adjustment strategies (express emotion, social support, problem avoidance, self criticism and social withdrawal) had no significant differences between the Kalabari ethnic group and the Ogoni ethnic group.

This result was however, not surprising because, one expects that due to cultural differences among different ethnic groups, the adjustment strategies that would be adopted by widows to cope with widowhood stress may differ accordingly. The result of this study corroborated the findings of Oniye (2001) who also found out that significant differences existed between and among different ethnic groups in Nigeria with regards to adjustment strategies used by widows to cope with widowhood stress.

## **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 ethnic background.

## 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) Based upon the findings of the study with respect to importance of education in enhancing meaningful adjustment to widowhood, it is recommended that bereavement counselling should be provided to emphasize cognitive restructuring for widows to enable them accept their plight philosophically. In addition, they should be oriented to appreciate the inevitability of the phenomenon and the need to acquire requisite skills for survival after spousal bereavement.
- 3) Bereavement counselling to be provided, demands that counsellor-trainees be fortified with training in bereavement and widowhood counselling. This is necessary in order to equip the counsellor-trainees adequately to adequately meet the challenges of providing bereavement counseling. This is because, counsellors providing bereavement counselling ought to possess a thorough grasp of widowhood as a concept, widowhood stress level and sources as well as the adjustment strategies options to be adopted.

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