



Cultural Challenges of Widows and Widowers' Coping Strategies in South-South Geo Political Zone, Nigeria

Dijeh Ann Emani, PhD¹, Prof. Nnubia Uju Emilia², Nwonye Ngozi U., PhD³

^{1,3}Department of Home Economics University of Calabar.

²Department of Home Economics, Michael Okpara University, Umudike.

ABSTRACT: The study is on cultural challenges and widows and widowers' coping strategies in South-South Geo-Political Zone, Nigeria. This research employed two research questions and two hypotheses to guide the study. The study employed survey research design. The study area were the six states of the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. A total of 441 widows and widowers in Federal Universities in South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria based on information from the registrar, ASUU form the sample of the study. Two different instruments were employed for data collection. The "Widows and Widowers Coping Strategies for Family and cultural Challenges" (WWCSFCC) questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion Guide for Widows and Widowers (FGDEWW). Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was used to determine the reliability of the instruments. Bar chart, mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. Independent t-test, simple were used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Bar chart, mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. Independent t-test, were used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study unveiled that there is no significance difference in the cultural challenges facing widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria and there is difference in the coping strategies that could be employed by widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Among others it was recommended that the families, friends and the society should be sensitized to clearly identify the challenges widows and widowers experience and, in the process, come up with alternative support systems that would help widowed persons adjust to widowhood.

KEYWORDS: Cultural, challenges, Coping, Strategies, Widows, Widowers

INTRODUCTION

This study focused on strategies needed by widows and widowers in coping with family and cultural challenges. Death has deprived so many people of their spouses, loved ones, children among others most especially when it is not expected. Losing a spouse in death is considered one of life's most stressful experience (Spahni, Bennett, Perrig-Chiello & Pasqualina, 2016). Widowhood is the condition in which a person has lost a significant person to the cold hands of death (Stroebe, Schut & Stroebe, 2007). Spousal widowhood is the state of having lost a spouse to death. The death could be sudden or anticipated. Spousal loss has been classified as one of the most devastating, traumatic and life-changing event anyone can experience (Clark and Georgellis, 2013). This condition subjects one to become a widow or a widower.

Consequently, the death of a husband dramatically alters a woman's status and leaves her at the mercy of her husband's family and relations who are customarily empowered to take decisions concerning her and the properties left behind by the deceased, not minding her welfare and that of her children, if any. The plight of widows is made worse by various widowhood rites, which, though not uniform in all societies, exist in one form or another almost everywhere. While it is more entrenched in the rural areas, the practice affects many urban women in the Nigerian societies especially as it is common with those who die in the cities but are to be buried in rural areas ("hometown burial"). As the prime suspect of her husband's death, the widow is usually compelled to go through an ordeal to prove her innocence. In some cases, she is made to drink the water used to wash the corpse. "To express their grief, widows are sometimes required to sleep on the floor, abstain from taking baths, shave their hair, and wear dirty rags as clothes for as long as mourning lasts" The widowers are not treated same way even when they are suspected of killing their spouse.

The problem of psychological maladjustment among widowers includes loss of companionship, inability to cope with new demands from the environment, fear of greater responsibilities at home, emotional attachment to bereaved spouse, family pressure and among others (Ong, 2010; Ogu et al, 2020) The devastating effects of this problem are that most widows and widowers are prone to moodiness, anxiety disorder, depression symptomatology, grief, higher rates of hospitalization, insufficient self-esteem,



lesser positive emotions, higher rates of loneliness, lower life satisfaction, poorer health and higher level of stress compared to their married counterparts lack of trust for anyone in the environment. Generally, indicators of well-being decline after the loss of a spouse (Bennett & Soulsby, 2012). Other experiences are sadness, helplessness, anger, reduced interest in ongoing activities, yearning and longing for the dead, recurrent thoughts of the deceased, increased susceptibility to illnesses, weight loss and functional impairment (Ogu, Obi & Isidiho, 2020).

In South-South geographical zone of Nigeria, the widows/widower observed are very emotional, most times, you see them just staying on their own looking at the picture of their lost spouse, talking to the picture as if it is a life being, telling the picture about how people are treating them because of their status as widows/widowers recalling their times together the good memories they share which causes tears and sorrow to them. It has been noticed that some widows go about seeking for financial help to take care of their responsibilities, feeding of the children and paying their school fees because the family members have confiscated their properties or business ventures. Most of them that their partners were the breadwinners could likely be subjected to their children dropping out of school because of economic hardship. This study therefore cantered on demographic characteristics of widows and widowers in South-South geo political zone in Nigeria.

THE CONCEPT OF CULTURAL CHALLENGES

Widowhood practices are observed by almost all the ethnic groups in Nigeria, particularly among the Yoruba, Igbo and Hausas. The culture of widowhood has been in existence from time immemorial and transmitted from generation to generation. The issue of widowhood, particularly in Nigeria, appears to have gender implication as there are certain cultural imbalances in the practices of widowhood by widows and widowers. Traditions are particularly hard on widows because widowhood involves varying degrees of physical hardship, deprivation, ritual contaminations, emotional instability, socio-economic and psychological trauma (Olanisebe, 2015). In Nigeria, particularly in Southwestern part, the travail of a widow begins as soon as the death of her husband is announced. The in-laws immediately demand for the list of the man's property and bank accounts, after which she is subjected to series of rites and ritual practices to mourn the death of her husband (Okoronkwo, 2015). This involves torturing and dehumanizing the widow and making her to undergo series of rituals. Oloko (2001) summated that a widow is made to feel miserable, wretched and guilty over her loss. She is seen and treated as ill-luck goat to be avoided so that she does not infect other women. The author also reported that in different parts of the country, widowhood is associated with rituals and taboos, which are degrading and inhuman. Part of the ritual include the initial seven days' confinement in a particular room, though where people could have access to her, putting on black or dark clothes and in most cases, having her hairs shaved (Olanisebe, 2015, and Sossou, 2002). The proper mourning could last for three months initially, while the duration of wearing dark clothes ranges from three months to one year, depending on culture, religion and family position on the matter. A widow goes into confinement for seven days in which she is not allowed to go out, or take her bath or change her clothes, she is expected to sit on bare floor or a mat at best, only few influential and educated widows are being provided with mattress to put on the floor, this according to him is also subject to the kind of relationship existing between the widow and her in-laws. Of a fact, widowhood has not been a pleasant experience, but nature has made it a necessary lifestyle, consequence upon the death of the husband.

On further clarification, Fasonranti and Aruma (2007) reported that in some Yoruba communities, a widow is expected to eat from broken plates and cook with broken pots, and on the seventh day, her hair is shaved to sever the bond between her and the dead husband. She is also expected to keep vigils and appears very sorrowful by wailing and crying profusely. If she fails to mourn, it is believed that she may become mentally deranged or forfeit the right to any benefit. After this, she goes into mourning proper, which could be for a period of three or four months (120 days) during which she is to be of impeccable behavior so that her late husband's spirit may gain quick entry into the community of his ancestral spirit. At the end of three or four months, a widow will perform the outing ceremony, which include being washed in the night after having the final wailing, making some rituals which are expected to finally put the spirit of the departed soul to final rest and performs the "outing" rites which involves changing of dresses and being led to the market. The outing rites also involve the widow going into an elaborate party which is referred to as "ijade-opo" to mark the outing. With this a widow will have to spend all she had left in shouldering the responsibilities of the ceremony. The widow then steps into the shoes of a provider, becoming the breadwinners of their family. On the inheritance right, the deceased husband's property is shared among his children. But if the family is a polygamous one, the property is shared among the number of wives he had. If on the other hand, the man left a will, his property will be shared in accordance with his will.



- **The concept of coping strategies**

Coping is the attempt to reduce physical and/or psychological stress or negative feelings that come about because of difficult circumstances. It also involves adjusting to tolerate negative events or realities while you try to keep your positive self-image and emotional equilibrium (Cleveland, 2020). Coping is the process of using behavioral and cognitive approach to manage difficult or threatening situations, and plays an integral role in maintaining the physical and mental well-being of an individual (Davis & Newell, 2022). Coping with the loss of a spouse creates the need to process an arduous life-transition, to grieve the death of the loved one, but also the changed life of the survivor, and to reestablish a new life worthy of passionate reinvestment (Neimeyer, 2005). "Losing a long-term partner can disrupt the continuity of the fabric of a life thoroughly and perhaps surprisingly interwoven with the strands of another, even when those lives were apparently self-sufficient" (Neimeyer, 2005)

Coping strategies are ways people handle stress, it is an action directed at the resolution or mitigation of a problematic situation (Karlsen, 2015). Coping strategies are a person's constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage (reduce, minimize, master, or tolerate) the internal and external demands of the person's environment transaction, that is appraised as taxing or exceeding the person's resources (Standridge, 2019). Coping strategies are malleable and complex; there is not a one-size fits all approach to coping, only successful or unsuccessful techniques. Successful coping strategies promote resilience, ensuring that older women aren't left depressed and emotionally distressed. The effectiveness of the coping strategy is based on how often they help people achieve beneficial emotions (Standridge, 2019). For example, family gatherings create an atmosphere that fosters happiness and hope, individuals would have a tendency to view this as an effective coping strategy, but if they create anxiety or anger another way of coping should be considered. Sharma, (2015) presents coping strategy as dealing with and attempting to overcome problems and difficulties.

The author went further to specify two broad categories of coping strategies as problem focused and emotional focused coping strategies. Problem coping strategy is based more on one's capability to think and alter the environmental event or situation. Example of this strategy at the taught level include utilisation of the problem-solving skills, interpersonal conflict resolution, advice seeking, time management, goal setting and gathering information about what is causing the challenge. Problem solving requires thinking through various solutions, evaluating the pros and cons of different solutions, and then implementing the solution that seems most advantageous in coping with the challenge. While emotion focused coping strategy is inward on altering the way one thinks or feels about a situation. Examples of this strategy at thought process level include denying the existence of the situation, making social comparisons, avoiding the situation, and at action level include seeking social support, use of exercise, relaxation, medication, practicing religious ritual and use of alcohol and drugs (Sharma, 2015).

Blum and Silver (2012) identified some common coping strategies as accepting the situation, confrontation, avoidance, denying the challenge, disengaging mentally, problem solving, seeking social support, controlling one's emotions, turning to religion and proactive coping. Coping strategy that lessen distress in one situation may be ineffective or even detrimental to the individual in another (Sharma, (2015). People respond to perception of threat, harm loss in diverse ways, many of receive the label of coping (Carve & Connor-Smith, 2010). Specifically, coping strategies can either facilitate or hinder adaptation to physical or psychological stress (Karlsen, 2015). It is widely recognised that it is not stress or challenge per se that determines adaptation outcomes, but rather how we cope with challenges that is critical in affecting our psychological and physical health (Aldwin, 2007). This reasoning would suggest that it is important to establish and maintain strong and supportive social networks because they could help ease difficult situations that people may face throughout their lives (Hvana & Richard, 2014; Rafieei, 2017)

Coping strategy is the inherent psychological disposition to handle challenges in any given situation or social environment and the inner resilience to adapt to any possible outcomes (Saphni, 2015). Simply put, "it is the psychological processes through which people manage or cope with the demands and challenges of everyday life" (Sharma, 2017). This suggests that coping strategy is a dynamic process emphasizing on a person's ability to meet changing circumstances (Sharma, 2017). Viewing coping strategy from a different but related angle, literatures describes coping strategy as "a general process in which an individual changes response patterns as the dimension of the environment changes via which his needs are satisfied according to societal demand (Dubow, 2011; Ugboaja, 2016). Raju and Rahamtulla (2007) defined coping strategy as a process of maintaining harmonious relationships between a living organism and its environment. Kulshrestha in Ugodulunwa and Anakwe (2012) described adjustment process as a way in which the individuals attempt to deal with stress, tensions, conflicts and meet their needs while making efforts at the same time to



maintain harmonious relationships with the environment. All these definitions and opinions on coping strategy imply that the person and the environment are two significant factors in coping strategy (Ugboaja, 2016).

Research objectives

Specifically, this study seeks to:

- 1 identified the cultural challenges facing widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.
- 2 identified the coping strategies that could be employed by widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

Research questions:

1. What are the cultural challenges faced widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria?
2. What are the coping strategies that could be employed by widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria?

Hypotheses

H0₃: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of widow and widowers on cultural challenges faced by them in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

H0₄: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of widows and widowers on coping strategies that could be employed by them in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Two different instruments were employed for data collection. One was a structured questionnaire that was based on the research objectives. The questionnaire titled “Widows and Widowers Coping Strategies for Family and cultural Challenges” (WWCSFCC) was made up of two sections A and B. Section A asked question that covered the demographics of respondents while section B focused on research questions to obtain data on the specific objective of the study. The questionnaire was structured using rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) for research questions 2,3,5, and 6 while research questions 7 and 8 mode of response was Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Moderate Extent (ME) and Low Extent (LE). The second instrument was Focus Group Discussion Guide for Widows and Widowers (FGDEWW) to solicit information on their coping strategies which contained five questions that were interpreted using percentages. The reliability of the instrument was established by trial testing on twenty widows and widowers that were not inclusive in the sampling size. The reliability was established using Cronbach Alpha to determine the reliability coefficient using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 which yielded reliability coefficient values ranges from 0.76-0.82. Bar chart, mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. Independent t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance

RESULTS

Research Question 1

What are the cultural challenges facing widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean responses of respondents on cultural challenges facing widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria (Widows = 289, Widowers = 144)

S/N	Cultural Challenges	Widows		Remark	Widowers		Remark
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁		\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	
1	I was subjected to ritual contaminations	3.18	.527	A	2.88	.548	A
2	I was treated as ill-luck goat to be avoided so that I do not infect others.	3.34	.475	A	2.28	.449	R
3	I was subjected to seven days confinement in a particular room.	3.31	.462	A	2.22	.412	R
4	I was mandated to putting on black or dark cloths and having my hairs shaved.	3.38	.486	A	2.18	.386	R



5	I was expected to eat from broken plates and cook with broken pots.	3.45	.498	A	2.23	.498	R
6	I was expected to keep vigils and appear very sorrowful by wailing and crying profusely.	3.40	.491	A	2.22	.593	R
7	I performed outing ceremony that involved washing in the night after having the final wailing and making some rituals.	3.26	.441	A	2.36	.716	R
8	I was handed over in marriage to my husband's younger brother,	3.33	.472	A	2.27	.628	R
9	Because I refused to marry my spouse sibling, family disowned me together with my children and left us to fend for themselves.	3.21	.406	A	2.42	.798	R
10	I am accused of having hand in the death of spouse	3.29	.453	A	2.24	.555	R
Cluster Mean		3.32	.471	A	2.33	.558	R

Table 1 shows the responses of respondents on cultural challenges facing widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. All the 10 items were above the cut-off point of 2.50 and were accepted by widows as cultural challenges facing them. On the other hand, all the items but one was below the cut-off of 2.50 and were rejected as the cultural challenges facing widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The standard deviation of .471-498 for widows shows that the standard deviation from the mean was close. This means that widows were not far apart in their responses. The standard deviation range of .558-.789 for widowers was relatively close and this means that they were convergent in their responses.

Research Question 2

What are the coping strategies that could be employed by widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean responses of respondents on the coping strategies that could be employed by widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. (Widows = 289, Widowers = 144)

S/N	Coping Strategies	Widows		Remark	Widowers		Remark
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁		\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	
1	I employ problem solving strategy	3.27	.445	A	3.19	.397	A
2	I engage in positive thinking and seek divine intervention	3.34	.475	A	3.23	.422	A
3	I take medication to care for my health	3.32	.467	A	3.13	.332	A
4	I employ insensitivity technique to issues I dislike.	3.36	.481	A	2.14	.347	R
5	I face my challenges by accepting that life is for the living.	3.28	.448	A	3.24	.637	A
6.	I employ attention diversion to certain issues	3.30	.460	A	3.24	.430	A
7	I put much effort to controlling my emotions	2.24	.922	R	3.23	.422	A
8	I engage time management and self-talk most.	3.25	.433	A	3.23	.422	A
9	I use denial strategy	2.07	.459	R	3.44	1.00	A
10	I employ biofeedback and relaxation in handling issues.	3.26	.439	A	2.08	.509	R
11	I employ goal setting and faith strategies in coping with my challenges.	3.51	.672	A	3.26	.438	A



12	I take care of situations using confrontation Strategy.	2.21	.409	R	3.26	.442	A
13	I try as much as possible to apply avoidance strategy.	3.28	.452	A	2.13	.340	R
14	I employ social support and acquire new skills for survival.	3.11	.535	A	2.24	.648	R
15	I engage in social interaction and leisure.	2.92	.434	A	3.23	.422	A
16	I engage in alcohol and drug as coping strategy.	2.18	.382	R	2.27	.446	R
17	I engage in religious activities.	3.29	.453	A	2.19	.392	R
18	I sleep with the opposite sex to overcome my challenges.	3.39	.488	A	2.16	.368	R
19	I seek for counselling when am faced with challenges.	3.41	.492	A	3.14	.347	A
Cluster Mean		3.05	.492	A	2.84	.461	A

Table 2 shows the various coping strategies that could be employed by widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Out of the 19 items, 16 have their mean above the cut-off 2.50 and were accepted as coping strategies for widows. However, 13 out of the 19 items have their mean above the cut-off point of 2.50 and were accepted as coping strategies for widowers. The cluster mean of ($\bar{X} = 3.05$) and ($\bar{X} = 2.84$) shows that widows and widowers accept that coping strategies could be employed by them in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The standard deviation of range shows that widows and widowers were convergent in their responses.

Hypotheses testing

Hypothesis 1

There is no significance difference on the cultural challenges facing widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

Table 3: t-test analysis of the mean ratings of widows and widowers on cultural challenges facing them in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

S/N	Items	Widows		Widowers		df	p-value @ .05	Decision
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
1	I was subjected to ritual contaminations	3.18	.527	2.88	.548	431	.602	NS
2	I was treated as ill-luck goat to be avoided so that I do not infect others.	3.34	.475	2.28	.449	431	.004	S
3	I was subjected to seven days confinement in a particular room.	3.31	.462	2.22	.412	431	.000	S
4	I was mandated to putting on black or dark cloths and having my hairs shaved.	3.38	.486	2.18	.386	431	.000	S
5	I was expected to eat from broken plates and cook with broken pots.	3.45	.498	2.23	.498	431	.000	S
6	I was expected to keep vigils and appear very sorrowful by wailing and crying profusely.	3.40	.491	2.22	.593	431	.000	S



7	I performed outing ceremony that involved washing in the night after having the final wailing and making some rituals.	3.26	.441	2.36	.716	431	.000	S
8	I was handed over in marriage to my husband's younger brother,	3.33	.472	2.27	.628	431	.892	NS
9	Because I refused to marry my spouse sibling, family disowned me together with my children and left us to fend for themselves.	3.21	.406	2.42	.798	431	.000	S
10	I am accused of having hand in the death of spouse	3.29	.453	2.24	.555	431	.466	NS
Cluster Value		3.32	.471	2.33	.558	431	.196	NS

Table 3 showed that at .05 level of significance with 431 degree of freedom, the P-value of .196 which was greater than the alpha level of .05 is obtained. With this result, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significance difference in the cultural challenges facing widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria is therefore accepted.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significance difference in the coping strategies that could be employed by widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

Table 4: t-test analysis of the mean ratings of widow and widower on coping strategies that could be employed by them in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

S/N	Items	Widows		Widowers		df	P-value @ .05	Decision
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
1	I employ problem solving strategy	3.27	.445	3.19	.397	431	.000	S
2	I engage in positive thinking and seek divine intervention	3.34	.475	3.23	.422	431	.000	S
3	I take medication to care for my health	3.32	.467	3.13	.332	431	.000	S
4	I employ insensitivity technique to issues I dislike.	3.36	.481	2.14	.347	431	.000	S
5	I face my challenges by accepting that life is for the living.	3.28	.448	3.24	.637	431	.000	S
6	I employ attention diversion to certain issues	3.30	.460	3.24	.430	431	.000	S
7	I put much effort to controlling my emotions	2.24	.922	3.23	.422	431	.000	S
8	I engage time management and self-talk most.	3.25	.433	3.23	.422	431	.356	NS
9	I use denial strategy	2.07	.459	3.44	1.002	431	.000	S
10	I employ biofeedback and relaxation in handling issues.	3.26	.439	2.08	.509	431	.024	S
11	I employ goal setting and faith strategies in coping with my challenges.	3.51	.672	3.26	.438	431	.000	S



12	I take care of situations using confrontation Strategy.	2.21	.409	3.26	.442	431	.017	S
13	I try as much as possible to apply avoidance strategy.	3.28	.452	2.13	.340	431	.000	S
14	I employ social support and acquire new skills for survival.	3.11	.535	2.24	.648	431	.223	NS
15	I engage in social interaction and leisure.	2.92	.434	3.23	.422	431	.001	S
16	I engage in alcohol and drug as coping strategy.	2.18	.382	2.27	.446	431	.000	S
17	I engage in religious activities.	3.29	.453	2.19	.392	431	.000	S
18	I sleep with the opposite sex to overcome my challenges.	3.39	.488	2.16	.368	431	.000	S
19	I seek for counselling when am faced with challenges.	3.41	.492	3.14	.347	431	.000	S
	Cluster Values	3.05	.492	2.84	.461	431	.033	S

Table 4 showed that at .05 level of significance with 431 degree of freedom, the P-value of .033 which was less than the alpha level of .05 is obtained. With this result the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significance difference in the coping strategies that could be employed by widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria is therefore rejected. This means that there is difference in the coping strategies that could be employed by widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Cultural challenges of widows and widowers

The result in Table 1 and Table 3 disclosed that there was no significant difference in the cultural challenges facing widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria as shown in Table 4.9 as the p value is .196, therefore the null hypothesis was retained. This finding supports the opinion of Ogweno, (2010) that the issue of widowhood, particularly in Nigeria, appears to have gender implication as there are certain cultural imbalances in the practices of widowhood by widows and widowers.

To support this further Olanisebe, (2015) said that traditions are particularly hard on widows because widowhood involves varying degrees of physical hardship, deprivation, ritual contaminations, emotional instability, socio-economic and psychological trauma. In Nigeria, particularly in Southwestern part, the travail of a widow begins as soon as the death of her husband is announced. The in-laws immediately demand for the list of the man's property and bank accounts, after which she is subjected to series of rites and ritual practices to mourn the death of her husband (Okoronkwo, 2015; Olanisebe, (2015)). This involves torturing and dehumanizing the widow and making her to undergo series of rituals. Oloko (2001) summated that a widow is made to feel miserable, wretched and guilty over her loss. She is seen and treated as ill-luck goat to be avoided so that she does not infect other women. For instance, Okoro and Nkama (2018) provides overwhelming evidences on widowhood practices in Igbo culture of the South-Eastern part of Nigeria and the violence perpetuated against widows from relatives and family members and that some widows and widowers are accused of having hand in the death of their spouse.

On the contrary, widowers across Nigeria rarely go through these ordeals at the demise of their wives. From observations, they are not subjected to indignities when their wives die, they are not compelled to mourn, nor subjected to any of the dehumanizing experiences which widows go through (Wuraola,2016). Olukayode, (2015) opined that the disorganizing and traumatic experience which accompanies death of husbands, tends to be greater on women than that of men when they lose their wives. Ezeifeke (2014), conducted research on 'You're Responsible for His Death': Widowhood in Igbo Gender Construction and Struggle for Agency in Selected Literary 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 accusing her of having a hand in the death of her husband.



Coping strategies of widows and widowers

From the findings of this study as shown in Table 2 and Table 4 it is glaring the widows and widower in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria employ various coping strategies towards their family and cultural challenges. Out of the 19 items, 16 have their mean above the cut-off 2.50 and were accepted as coping strategies for widows. However, 13 out of the 19 items have their mean above the cut-off point of 2.50 and were accepted as coping strategies for widowers. The cluster mean of ($\bar{X} = 3.05$) and ($\bar{X} = 2.84$) shows that widows and widowers accept that coping strategies could be employed by them in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The standard deviation of range shows that widows and widowers were convergent in their responses. The null hypothesis that stated there is no significance difference in the coping strategies that could be employed by widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria was rejected since the calculated probability value was .033 and is less than the declared probability value .05. The significant difference may be as a result in sex difference, the way men handle challenges may differ from the way women do. This finding supports the fact that widowhood is state that one needs to cope with using behavioural and cognitive approach to manage difficult or threatening situations, which plays an integral role in maintaining the physical and mental well-being of an individual (Davis and Newell, 2022; Neimeyer, 2005; Karlsen, 2015; Standridge, 2019; Sharma, 2015).

To further this finding, Blum and Silver (2012) identified some common coping strategies employed by widows and widowers as accepting the situation, confrontation, avoidance, denying the challenge, disengaging mentally, problem solving, seeking social support, controlling one's emotions, turning to religion and proactive coping. Most of these identified strategies were employed by widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Their differences in the choice of coping strategies though significant supports the fact that coping strategy that lessen distress in one situation may be ineffective or even detrimental to the individual in another (Sharma, 2015).

Widows and widowers in South South geopolitical zone in Nigeria adapt to the coping strategies to different extent. Out of the total of 19 coping strategies, widows could adapt to 1 item to very high extent, 15 strategies to a high extent, while they 3 to a low extent. On the other hand, widowers could adapt to 12 to high extent and 7 strategies to a low extent in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The null hypothesis that stated there is no significance difference to the extent widows and widowers adapt to the coping strategies in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria had P-value of .243 which is higher than the alpha level of .05, therefore the null hypothesis is retained. The result of this finding may be as a result everyone wanting to live and move on with life. Therefore, both widows and widowers will want live for their children and try their best to adapt to the coping strategies available. This finding supports the view of Steinberg (2011) that humans have an astonishing adapting ability to whatever life presents to them. He continued that a person is not born 'adjusted' or 'maladjusted, it is his physical, mental and emotional potentialities that are influenced and directed by the factors of environment in which he found himself that will determine his coping strategy. Ugboaja, (2016) went further to support this by saying that in the course of coping strategy, social interaction is of great necessity for a person's adaptation to psychological and social wellbeing. This reasoning would suggest that it is important to establish and maintain strong and supportive social networks because they could help ease difficult situations that people may face throughout their lives (Hvana & Richard, 2014; Rafieei, 2017)

CONCLUSION

It is also concluded widows and widowers employ different coping strategies to manage their widowhood period at same vein widows and widowers adapt to the coping strategies at different level of extent. Differences in challenges based on gender (widows and widowers) in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria affirmed that widows and widowers were divergent in their responses in respect to their challenges South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria therefore, employ some coping strategies in order to adjust to their present condition. The widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria adapt to the coping strategies at different level of extent. It is also concluded that is a very high interaction effects between family and cultural challenges among widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria and there exist a moderate multiple interaction effects between coping strategies among widows and widowers in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of data analysis, the following recommendations was made by the researcher



1. The families, friends and the society should be sensitized to clearly identify the challenges widows and widowers experience and, in the process, come up with alternative support systems that would help widowed persons adjust to widowhood.
2. Government and voluntary organization should provide the needed help to widows and widowers in order to strengthen their adjustment to be able to cope with the challenges. Widows and widowers should be encouraged by these bodies to join support groups such as therapy, self-care, income generating activities that would facilitate their adjustment to widowhood.

REFERENCES

1. Aldwin, C. M. (2007). Stress, coping and development. An integrative perspective. New York: Guilford press
2. Aransiola, J. O. (2010). Widowhood practices among the Yorubas of South-West Nigeria: Are differences in what women experience due to their status. *Gender and Behaviour* 8(2)
3. Bennett, K. M. & Soulsby, L.K. (2012). Wellbeing in bereavement and widowhood. *Illness Crisis Loss*, 20: 321–337..
4. Blum, S. and Sliver, R. C. (2012). Coping encyclopedia of human behaviour. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics> on 20/13/21..
5. Carver, C. S. & Connor-Smith, J. (2010). Personality and coping. *Annual Review of Psychology* 1:676-704..
6. Chauhan, S. S. (2002) *Advanced educational psychology*. Vikas publishing House PVT Ltd pp. 412-417.
7. Cleveland, C. (2020). Stressors: Coping skills and strategies. Retrieved from <http://my.clevelandclinic.org/health> on 20/03/21.
8. Davis, D. & Newell, A. (2022). Coping strategies, types and examples. Retrieved from <http://study.com/learn/coping-st>.. on 20/13/21.
9. Dubow, E. F. & Rubinlicht, M. (2011). Coping encyclopedia of adolescence. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics> on 20/12/21..
10. Eweluka, U.U. (2002): "Post-colonialism, Gender, Customary injustice: Widows in African Societies", *Human Rights Quarterly*, 24 (2): 99.
11. Fasoranti, O.O. and Aruma, J.O. (2007). Across-cultural comparison of practices relating to widowhood and widow-inheritance among the Igbo and Yoruba in Nigeria. *Journal of World Anthropology*, 1(1):53-73. .
12. Grealley, H. (2017). Living Through the Death of Your Partner or Spouse. Bereaved Families of Ontario-Cornwall. <http://bfocornwall.ca/living-through-the-death-of-your-partner-or-spouse/> on 20/03/21
13. Hvana, A., & Richard, E. L. (2014). Does social relationship buffer the effects of widowhood? A Prospective study of adaptation to loss of a spouse. *Jpers* 82(5):367-378.
14. Iruloh, R. R. & Elsie, W. (2018). Adjustment strategies of widowhood stress based on their age: The case off River State, Nigeria. *European American Journal* 6(1):76-91.
15. Karlsen, B. (2015). Is coping a scientific concept? *Nordisk Syngeplegeforskning* 5:1-16.
16. Neimeyer, R.A. (2005). *Lessons of loss: A guide to coping*. Keystone Heights, FL: Psycho Educational Resources, Inc..
17. Ogu, C. C., Obi, D. O. and Isidiho, P. E. (2020). Widow practices and its challenges on the human dignity of widow in Nneato in Imo State West Africa in the 21st century. *International Journal of Science and Research* 9(11):1050-1056.
18. Ogwen, C. A. (2010). Widows and widowers' experiences and their coping mechanism in a deprived community. A case study of Kibera slum. Unpublished thesis, university of Nairobi.
19. Olakitike, O. (2009): "Cruelty in the Name of Culture", *Pulsewire Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.worldpulse.com/user/1265/journal> on 20/04/21.
20. Olanisebe, S. O. (2015). The plight of widowhood in Nigeria: Reflection on 2Kings 4:1-7 *Journal of Religious Studies* 5(1):1-16.
21. Olukayode, A., J. (2015). Widowhood practices in some Nigerian societies: A retrospective examination. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 5(4):67-73.
22. Okoro, K. N. & Nkama, C. L. (2018). Widowhood practices in Africa (Igbo) traditional society: Socio- anthropological (Re) interpretation. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(9):42-54.



23. Okoronkwo, S. O, (2015). Culture of widowhood practices in Africa: De- institutionalizing the plight of women and communicating development through theatre. *American Journal of Social Science Research* 1(2):71-76.
24. Peterman, A. (2012). Widowhood and asset inheritance in Sub-Saharan Africa: Emperical evidence from 15 countries. *Development Policy Review* 30:5.
25. Rafieei, N. (2013). Examing the role of social support on adjustment to widowhood. Unpublished dissertation, Arizona State University. Retrieved from <http://ac.uk>>pdf on 12/20/21.
26. Raju and Rahamtulla (2007), J.K. (2007). Adjustment problems among school students. *Journal of Indian Academic of applied psychology*, 19:523-532.
27. Sossou, M. A. (2002). Widowhood practices in West Africa: The silent victims. *International Journal of Social Welfare* 11: 201-209.
28. Spahni, S., Bennett, K. M., Perrig-Chiello & Pasqualina, P. (2016). Psychological adaptation to spousal bereavement in old age: The role of trait resilience, marital history, and context of death. *Death studies*, 40(3):182-190.
29. Standridge, S. (2019). Widow and leisure: The role of leisure in personal coping strategies. Unpublished dissertation, Middle Tennessee State University. Retrieved from <https://jewlscholar.mtsu.edu>> on 22/04/22.
30. Steinberg, L. (2011). *Adolescence*, 9th ed New York, NY: McGraw Hill.
31. Stroebe M. S. Schut, H. & Stroebe W (2007). Health outcomes of bereavement. *Lancet*; 370: 1960–1973.
32. Ugboaja, C. (2016). Classroom climate as a correlate of secondary school adolescent’s psycho-social adjustment in Okigwe education zone of Imo state. M.Ed. Thesis. Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
33. Ugodulunwa, C.A & Anakwe, A.I. (2012). Factorial validity of a school adjustment school for adolescents in Matanu State. *The Educational Psychologist* 6(1) 30-38.
34. Wuraola, A. C. (2016). Widowhood and its harmful practices: causes, effects and the possible way out for widows and women folk. *World Journal of Educational Research* 3(2):380-387

Cite this Article: Emani, D. A., Emilia, N. U., Nwonye Ngozi U. (2025). Cultural Challenges of Widows and Widowers’ Coping Strategies in South-South Geo Political Zone, Nigeria. International Journal of Current Science Research and Review, 8(2), pp. 550-560. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijcsrr/V8-i2-01>