

## Counseling Needs of Widows in Rivers State: Implications for Counseling

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### Abstract

This study investigated the counselling needs of widows in Rivers State implication for study. The sample of this study consisted of 2000 widows from Rivers State. These widows were drawn using the purposive sampling technique. The instrument used for the data collection was a self made questionnaire-widows needs assessment questionnaire (WNAQ). This was validated and its reliability coefficient was 0.84 and 66 respectively.

The WNAQ sought information on widows counselling needs based on their age, family size, size of children and socio-economic background. Each item had 4 point likerf scale set against it. The response options ranged from strongly needed to needed. Each subject was required to indicate the extent to which widows needed guidance or not. Two hypotheses were formulated for the study. T-test statistics was used to test the hypotheses respectively. It was found that widows needed counselling services irrespective of their age and family size respectively.

There is no significant difference between this counselling need of young widows and their elderly ones. There is no significant difference between the counselling needs of the widows with large families and those with small family size. On the basis of these findings, it was recommended that Government should design all human rights programme with a gender component to automatically include an assessment of the widow's situation and their access to economic and social rights. The widows should be of height priority and finally programmes for the widows' empowerment are necessary if their rehabilitation is to be achieved.

### Introduction

Recently, Nigerians have seen the need for counseling services as a panacea for varieties of developmental tasks. Okeke (2003:105) sees it as a dynamic instrument for changes and a tool for national growth and development.

Supporting the above view, Briggs (2005) observed that from a narrow perspective, counselling services are perceived as accomplishment that one acquires in schools, colleges or from private individuals instructors. UNESCO (2004) report signaled that the need and demand for counseling services are assumed to be enormous and will continue to expand.

Although, they are difficult to measure. The report points to key indicators such as urban population growth increase in the number of working authors, demographic changes and the education profile of the country.

A widow is a woman who has lost her husband through death and usually she feels an ominous ring of finality and heartrending grief which is almost incomparable in any other type. This situation is unlike a perceived of a husband louse through divorce, separation, or abandonment or rejection in which they can still meet though not on good terms.

In Nigeria, 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. The prevailing attitude suggests that a widow cannot own property in her own right. In such situations, widows tend to suffer a lot at 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 abuse. This tragedy is magnified in Africa by HIV/AIDS especially if their late husband had died of HIV/AIDS and infected them with the disease. Although inheritance rights are stipulated under the common land most people especially women are generally fearful of pursuing these

issues simply because, most deaths of male spouses are usually blamed on the widows (Phaladze, 2003). Some researchers posited that unless something is done to counsel widows, their families will scarcely make progress in life as other families do (Dinkpa 2006).

Therefore, counselling needs of widows refers to certain indispensable knowledge areas that widows are lacking or short of, without which they cannot successfully actualize their positive economical, educational, vocational and personal social dreams in their new situation of life. These widows that lost the husband discover immediately that they are in a complex environment and need help to understand their new situation and consequently make adjustment. The greatest problem facing most widows is loss of social status and reduction or reduced enormous circumstances. This is across the world common experience. Although, older widows above 60 years may suffer a dramatic but subtle change in their social life. The monetary value of widows pension is a continuing source of grievance since the value often does not keep up with frustrations in the ever changing cost of living indices or with expectations that the older generation of widows may have had of what life would be like in retirement. The relative of older widow and younger widowed matters and their children due to the dismantling of welfare systems in the north and eastern Europe while not comparable to the pauperization of widows in Asia and Africa, marginalize them from mainstream society and increases their vulnerability to depression, ill health and violence (Edwin, 2001).

However, it must not be forgotten that many widows are erroneously resourceful and resilient and go on to manage successful creative lives both personally and professionally.

One of the most consistent findings by various authors with regards to African widows is the degree to which they are economically self-reliant (Potash 1986). African widows generally contribute substantially to household economy and often provide most or all the support for themselves and their children. In some African societies women are primarily subsistence producers and men in others. The type and degree of female and male economic interdependence relates to labour organization, the requirements of the productive technology and the pattern of income distribution. Men and women in some cases control their own income. But in many resources are pooled together. This type of income control has implications for the widow. This is so because the widow may not differentiate her income and property from that of the husband since the influence of the kin group, the inheritance rules and kinship ties are strong among many African societies and are often more emphasized than marital ties. A widow stands a chance of losing access to property jointly acquired with her husband thereby starting a new economic life on the death of the husband. The above is also applicable to the Rivers State widows. The belief in Rivers State is that those of the rural areas will systematically differ from urban widows in terms of their economic survival strategies. They depend on agriculture and as well as ownership and right to inherit and use land. One would expect that the widows should inherit her husband's property and estate and sustain herself and her family from there. This is not the case for these widows.

Culturally, the widows are required as being unclean and contaminated thus highlighting the need for some cleansing rites which are expensive, debasing and dehumanizing irrespective of the widows age, number of children given birth to, size of family, and socio-economic background of the family. An examination of the comments of two widows in Nwoga (1989), a 75 year's old widow recounts her experience when she lost her husband in 1978 shows that she was asked for the passbook and other valuable items which she gave over to them. The second informant, a 35 years old widow and mother of 4 children noted that their entire property was confiscated. A lorry was sent from home to come and pack all in their supermarket.

The disorganizing and traumatic experience which accompanied death of husband tends to be greater on widows with large family size than with small family size. This is so because widows with large family size suffer while because the possibilities of taking care of the large family when all the properties belonging to the late husband and the widow has been confiscated by the man's relations. Although, widows with small family size suffer also significant life crisis and severe deep emotional bonds in a lifetime. Her sufferings are not as much as the one with large family size because she has little to care for. The greatest problem facing most widows in Rivers State is lacking counselling needs. The essence is to provide widows with a better knowledge of how to manage cases of hosting dehumanizing as a result of loss of husband with a view to eliminate such acts entirely from our society.

## Statement of the Problem

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. There have been newly suspicion that there are more incidence of widows dehumanizing activities in Nigeria. Others speculations attribute the frequency of widows debasing to certain states than certain areas in Rivers State taking care of their numbers than the other especially with prospect to number of children and age of the widows respectively. These unverified claims appear to play very significant roles in both cross-cultural and within cultural process investigation. Therefore, the main problem, this study sought to investigate is what are the counseling needs of widows in Rivers State.

## Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to grind this study.

**Ho<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant mean difference between the counseling needs of young widows and their elderly counterparts.

**Ho<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant mean difference between the counseling needs of widows with large family size and those with small family size.

## Method:

This is a descriptive research design. A total of 2000 respondents (widows) are used for the study. This comprises of 100 widows from each of the 20 communities selected for the sampling through purposive sampling method. Simple random sampling balloting with replacement was used to draw a sample of 20 communities of the 27 major communities in Ikwerre geopolitical zone. From the 20 communities, purposive sampling method was uses to draw a sample of 100 widows from each of the 20 communities making a total of 2000 widows used for this study. Widows' needs assessment questionnaire (WNAQ) was developed by the researcher for data collection on a 4 points world scale (#) 4321. Strongly needed (4), needed (3), undecided (U) 2 and not needed (NN) 1. The responses were also weighed as 4, 3, 2, 1, to positive questions and 1, 2, 3, 4, respectively for negative questions. On the scale, the question naira was divided into three pairs- part A, B, and C. The selection A part consist of an appeal to the respondents for the sincerity of their response and explanation on the purpose for the study. The second B part consist of important information showing the particular place, occupation, age, and time of widowhood of the respondent concerned. The part C contains 30 questionnaire items on general detailed information concerning the widows' age, family size. The WNAQ had a reliability coefficient of 0.84 and 0.66 coefficient of stability through Cronback alpha reliability coefficient therefore, considered reliable for the study.

## Results

The results of the data obtained from this certain study were analyzed with respect to the hypotheses stated earlier.

### Hypothesis One:

There is no significant mean difference between the counselling needs of young widows and their elderly counterparts.

This hypothesis was answered with t-test analysis on table 1 below:

### T-test analysis of the counseling needs of the young and elderly widows in rivers state

**TABLE 1**

S/N	Items		N	X	sd	t-cal	t-crit	Remark
1.	Make suitable friends	Young widows	800	3.35	1.74	4.73	1.96	A
		Elderly widows	1200	3.00	1.80			
2.	Share things or feeling with others.	Young widows	800	2.91	1.96	44.37		
		Elderly widows	1200	3.30	1.95			
3.	Reason or do things on their own.	Young widows	800	2.06	1.80	176	1.96	A
		Elderly widows	1200	3.50	1.78			
4.	Express themselves freely.	Young widows	800	3.00	1.92	1.96		A
		Young widows	1200	3.20	1.98			
5.	Understand themselves properly.	Young widows	800	3.40	1.85	16.9	1.96	A
		Elderly widows	1200	2.00	1.76			
6.	Assess themselves properly to known their areas of strengths and weakness.	Young widows	800	3.35	1.77	14.5	1.96	A
		Elderly widows	1200	2.20	1.69			
7.	Control their temperaments or emotions.	Young widows	800	3.22	1.83	3.27	196	A
		Elderly widows	1200	3.50	1.94			
8.	Form positive concepts about themselves.	Young widows	800	2.10	1.86	1.23	1.96	R
		Elderly widows	1200	2.00	1.79			
9.	Make adjustment in their Behaviours when need be.	Young widows	800	3.40	1.86	2.03	1.96	A
		Elderly widows	1200	3.23	1.79			
10.	Increase self-confidence.	Young widows	800	3.20	1.93	3.8	1.96	A
		Elderly widows	1200	2.87	1.86			
11.	Develop healthy personalities.	Young widows	800	2.95	1.88	8.61	1.96	A
		Elderly widows	1200	3.60	1.95			
12.	Take proper care of their belonging.	Young widows	800	3.60	1.90	69	1.96	A
		Elderly widows	1200	3.00	1.89			
13.	Manage unemployment stress.	Young widows	800	3.30	1.79	16.	1.96	A
		Elderly widows	1200	2.00	1.76			
14.	Maintain cordial	Young widows	800	3.00	1.82		1.96	A

	relationship with children in order to reduce stress.	Elderly widows	1200	3.50	1.90	59		
15.	Maintain cordial relationship with husband's relatives.	Young widows	800	2.76	1.80		1.96	A
		Elderly widows	1200	3.25	1.78	5.99		
16.	Cope with pressure from husband relatives.	Young widows	800	3.40	1.69	7.45	1.96	A
		Elderly widows	1200	2.8	1.85			
17.	Cope with hardship due to economic pressure.	Young	800	3.30	1.87	2.32		
		Elderly widows	1200	3.10	1.92			
18.	Cope with stress from children.	Young widows	800	2.90	1.74		1.96	R
		Elderly widows	1200	3.00	1.88	1.22		
19.	Manage resources without being wasteful.	Young widows	800	2.80	1.92		1.96	R
		Elderly widows	1200	2.73	1.84	0.81		
20.	Manage large family size.	Young widows	800	3.00	1.86		1.96	A
		Elderly widows	1200	3.50	1.79	5.98		
21.	Develop interest in school work.	Young widows	800	2.80	1.90	10.4	1.96	A
		Elderly widows	1200	1.90	1.88			
22.	Cope with examination anxiety.	Young widows	800	2.50	1.81		1.96	A
		Elderly widows	1200	1.00	1.75	18.4		
23.	Avoid difficult academic challenges in class.	Young widows	800	2.00	1.79		1.96	A
		Elderly widows	1200	2.75	1.69	3.13		
24.	Develop effective study habit.	Young widows	800	3.00	1.84		1.96	A
		Elderly widows	1200	2.10	1.80	10.8		
25.	Gets information regarding further studies.	Young widows	800	2.69	1.76	10.17	1.96	A
		Elderly widows	1200	1.86	1.83			
26.	Identify the local trades in their area.	Young widows	800	3.00	1.88		1.96	R
		Elderly widows	1200	2.91	1.79	1.07		
27.	Choose occupation of interest.	Young widows	800	2.75	1.91		1.96	A
		Elderly widows	1200	3.00	1.87			

28.	Develop job-hunting skills	Young widows	800	3.00	1.85	3.02	1.96	A
		Elderly widows	1200	3.25	1.76			
29.	Choose career that is important in the society.	Young widows	800	3.30	1.76		1.96	A
		Elderly widows	1200	3.00	1.89	3.63		
30.	Know much about the existing industries, factories or firms in their state.	Young widows	800	2.00	1.80		1.96	R
		Elderly widows	1200	1.93	1.77	0.86		

Table 1 above shows that the calculated t-values of all the items apart from items 8,18,19,26, and 30 were greater than the critical value of t (1.96) at 0.05 level of significance and degree of freedom (df) 1998. the null hypothesis in respect of the above terms was therefore rejected. This implied that significant difference exist between the counseling needs of the young widows and those of the elderly widows. On the other hand the calculated t-values for the items 8, 18, 19, 26 and 30 items were less than the critical t-value (1.96) at 0.05 alpha level and df 1998. The null hypothesis in respect of these items were accepted. This implied that the counseling need of the young widows did not differ significantly from those of the elderly counterparts in Rivers State.

#### Hypothesis Two:

There is no significant difference between the counseling needs of widows with large family size and those with small family size. This hypothesis was answered with t-test statistics on table 2 below:

**Table 2:**

#### T- test analysis of the counseling needs of widows with large and small family size at 0.08 level of significance.

S/N	Items		N	X	Sd	t-cal	t-crit	Remark
1.	Make suitable friends.	L.F.	1450	2.7	1.6	6.3	1.96	A
		S.F.						
2.	Share things or feeling with others.	L.F.	1450	3.00	1.00	7.03	1.96	A
		S.F.	550	2.67	1.07			
3.	Reason or do things on their own.	L.F.	1450	2.8	1.23	3.37	1.96	A
		S.F.	550	2.6	1.40			
4.	Express themselves freely	L.F.	1450	3.0	1.50	3.1	1.96	A
		S.F.	550	3.2	1.30			
5.	Understand themselves properly.	L.F.	1450	2.6	1.45	7.02	1.96	A
		S.F.	550	3.04	1.25			
6.	Assess themselves properly to know their areas of strengths and weakness	L.F.	1450	3.0	1.20	6.86	6.96	A
		S.F.	550	2.57	1.60			
7.	Control their temperaments or emotions.	L.F.	1450	2.6	1.06	2.59	1.96	A
		S.F.	550	2.75	1.53			
8.	Form positive concepts about	L.F.	1450	2.85	1.54	3.57	1.96	R

	themselves.	S.F.	550	2.63	1.00			
9.	Make adjustment in their behaviors when need be.	L.F. S.F.	1450 550	2.7 3.00	1.30 1.52	4.7	1.96	A
10.	Increases self-confidence.	L.F. S.F.	1450 550	3.03 3.08	1.12 1.60	0.82	1.96	R
11.	Develop healthy personalities.	L.F. S.F.	1450 550	2.68 2.50	1.07 1.08	3.67	1.96	A
12.	Take proper care of their belonging.	L.F. S.F.	1450 550	2.65 3.20	1.57 1.57	7.68	1.96	A
13.	Manage unemployment stress.	L.F. S.F.	1450 550	2.63 2.67	1.40 1.45	0.62	1.96	R
14.	Maintain cordial relationship with children in order to reduce stress.	L.F. S.F.	1450 550	2.70 3.03	1.35 1.28	0.55	1.96	R
15.	Maintain cordial relationship with husband's relatives.	L.F. S.F.	1450 550	2.60 2.59	4.63 1.30	0.15	196	R
16.	Cope with pressure from husband relatives.	L.F. S.F.	1450 550	3.20 2.77	1.70 1.45	5.87	1.96	A
17.	Cope with hardship due to economic pressure.	L.F. S.F.	1450 550	2.67 3.00	1.65 1.40	4.65	1.96	A
18.	Cope with stress from children	L.F. S.F.	1450 550	2.65 2.72	1.48 1.33	1.08	1.96	R
19.	Manage resources without being wasteful.	L.F. S.F.	1450 550	2.52 2.80	1.00 1.24	5.57	1.96	A
20.	Manage large family size	L.F. S.F.	1450 550	1.6 2.52	1.09 1.68	14.85	1.96	A
21.	Develop interest in school work	L.F. S.F.	1450 550	2.00 1.25	1.13 1.00	15.2	1.96	A
22.	Cope with examination anxiety	L.F. S.F.	1450 550	2.60 1.60	1.72 1.23	14.2	1.96	A
23.	Avoid difficult academic challenges in class	L.F. S.F.	1450 550	1.03 1.78	1.07 1.30	14.07	1.96 1.96	A
24.	Develop effective study habit	L.F. S.F.	1450 550	2.50 1.65	1.35 1.13	14.7		A
25.	Get information regarding further studies	L.F. S.F.	1450 550	2.70 2.00	1.00 1.50	12.52		A
26.	Identify the local trades in their a	L.F. S.F.	1450 550	2.80 3.24	1.58 1.68	5.92	1.96	A
27.	Choose occupation of interest	L.F. S.F.	1450 550	2.60 2.93	1.40 1.56	4.93	1.96	A
28.	Develop job-hunting skills	L.F. S.F.	1450 550	2.00 2.78	1.13 1.43	13.58	1.96	A

29.	Choose career that is important in the society	L.F	1450	2.64	1.66	2.87	1.96	A
		S.F	550	2.85	1.52			
30.	Know much about the existing industries, factories or firms in their state.	L.F	1450	1.50	1.24	19.98	1.96	A
		S.F	550	2.67	1.35			

Table 2 above shows that the critical t-value for all the items apart from items 10,13, 15 and 18 items were greater than the critical t-value (1.96) at 0.05 level of significance and df (1998) in respect of the above items was therefore rejected. It implied that significance difference existed between the counseling needs of the widows with large family size and those with small family size on the other hand. The calculated t-values for the items 10,13,15,and 18 were less than the critical value of t- (C-96) at 0.05 alpha level and 1998. the null hypothesis in respect of these items were accepted. This implied that the counseling needs of the widows with large family size differ significantly from those of the widows with small family size.

### Discussion of Findings

Hypothesis one states that there is no significant difference between the counselling needs of young widows and those of the elderly counterparts. The t-test analysis at 0.05 level of significance df 1998 indicated that the calculated t-value of some items like 1,2 and 3 were greater than the critical t-values (1-96) for those items. This means that the null hypothesis for such item was rejected, indicating that there is significant difference between the counselling needs of the young widows and those of their elderly counterparts. Although in some cases the results of the analysis shows that the calculated t-values at 0.05 level of significance and df 1998 were less than the critical t-value (1.96) leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis for such items such as items 18,19 and 26 in table one (1). This indicates that there is no significant difference between the counselling needs of young widows and those of the elderly counterparts. The reason for this result is that maturity level or age difference affects counselling needs of people. For example, the counselling needs of young widows of items 1,5,and 6 were significantly higher than those of the elderly ones as indicated by the mean values of those items on the other hand it can be concluded that the elderly widows counselling need of items 3,4,11 and 14 for example were significantly higher than those of their younger counterparts.

It is also proper to notice that most widows find themselves in the same condition especially in Nigeria and Rivers State in particular. To buttress this fact, the paper titled “Widows in the Third World Nations” (nd), widowhood represents “special death”. This implies that both young and old widows suffer the same traumatic experience desired for all widows in Africa.

The second hypothesis that states that there is no significant difference between the counselling needs of widows with large families and those with small family size indicates that widows with either small or large families need counselling services especially in such areas that help them to increase self-confidence, cope with pressure from husbands relatives, cope with hardship due to economic pressure and choose career that is important in the society which have the mean scores 8.03, 3.40, 3.30 and 3.30 respectively. Going through the questionnaire, items only two out of the thirty items were rejected as indicated in the table with mean score of 2.0 in each case. The widows’ high desire for counselling services irrespective of their family size could be as a result of the unfavourable economic and social conditions they face at the death of their spouse. From the paper titled “Widowhood in Nigeria (nd) and “the travels of widows in Nigeria” (Nd). It is confirmed that many widows face the problem of child’s indiscipline and finance. These have negative effects on both big and small families especially when the relations of the dead man are not in good harmony with the widows and their children. However, a closer observation of the counselling need items on table 2 indicates that the counselling needs of widows with large family size of item 2, 3, 6, and 8 for example are higher than those of widows with small family size are higher than those of the large family size of items 4, 5, 7, and 9.

### Implications for Counselling

The findings and conclusions reached in the study have for reaching implications for the



counselling profession and our educational system in Rivers State and Nigeria in general. Widows suffering of economically, physiological, and mental torture, denial of inheritance right to their husband property debasement, dehumanization and kept in seclusion for a period of time is the talk of the day among Rivers State widows, preventive counselling to curbing these cankerworm that has eaten deep into our societies should be applied right from courtship period, fantasy period and to the reality period in marriage relationship. Effective counselling services should be provided at all levels including schools, villages, university, hospital, government secretariat, market place, hair-dressing saloons, homes and so on.

If the preventive approach to tackling spouse economic problems, disinheritance, and dehumanization in widowhood is to be effective, then more professionally trained counselors should be employed to render effective counselling services to the teeming population of widows in Rivers State. A situation where one or two guidance counsellors are employed to render professional counseling services to over 20,000 widows in Rivers State, much is to be needed.

The counselling center should be built in Rivers State and equipped with materials needed to enable them function effectively such as psychologists and psychological tests materials, internet services, support staff etc.

A situation where people (widows) are just gathered together and enlightened on the danger of deprivation of their husband property and money is not professionally enough.

A conscious effort should be made to administer a questionnaire on a cross section of widows and the results from such questionnaires administration should be used as a base for inviting couples into counselling interviews.

Individuals or group counselling mode should be utilized by counsellors to re-orientate widows who have been identified as victims of physiological and mental torture based on the objective analysis of their measures of young and older and also on their measures of their family sizes.

## Conclusion

On the basis of the findings of the research study the following conclusion were made:

The study has identified some counselling needs of widows in Rivers State area of Nigeria such as economic, psychological, socio-cultural and educational practice counsellors and psychologists should rely on economic, psychological, social-cultural level to render her counselling needs to the widows in Rivers State.

Young and elderly widows have equal tendencies of involvement in the counselling services in Rivers State since both age, was found to have equal counselling need in the study. Both family sizes need counselling services especially in such areas that will help them increase self-confidence, cope with pressure from husband relatives, cope with hardship due to economic pressure.

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