
IMPROVING SUPPORT SYSTEMS IN ADDRESSING CHALLENGES OF ELDERLY WIDOWS IN NIGERIA THROUGH NON-FORMAL EDUCATION PRACTICES

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Abstract

A call for strengthening of the support systems to address the plights of elderly widows in Nigeria has thrown a challenge to social workers, adult and non-formal educators inclusive. On this ground, the paper explored the potentials of non-formal education in improving the support systems for elderly widows in Nigeria having discussed the phenomenon of widowhood practices and challenges of widows in the country. The paper also analysed current social support systems for elderly widows. Against the backdrop, the paper concluded that non-formal education practices such as self-empowerment of widows through preventive intervention education programme; restoration of African communal relationship through community development education; literacy and continuing opportunities and promotion of community based widows' associations can be of greater help in addressing the challenges of elderly widows in Nigeria.

Introduction

Marriage is an essential institution in every society in which man and woman live together legally as husband and wife. Normally, marriage is a life term relationship between the husband and the wife. This relationship could be terminated either by desertion, separation, divorce or the death of one of the two spouses. When the wife loses her husband through death, she is referred to as a widow. A widow is a woman whose spouse has died while the state of having one's spouse death is termed widowhood. The death of one's beloved is a permanent deprivation of relationship and fellowship between spouses. This event comes with it bereavement. Bereavement according to Kalu (1989) is an objective situation of losing someone that is significant. This situation according to him has two features which are expression of grief and observance of mourning process. He added that bereavement has a disruptive nature because it negates God's purpose for ordaining marriage among couples.

Therefore, the loss experienced by the widow upon the death of her husband may be related to loss of companionship, loss of confidant, loss of a home and loss of the father of her children. A widow in the light of foregoing is a woman who survived her

husband and has not remarried. Nwachukwu cited in Oniye (2000) conceived that a widow from her perspective and plight is a person who by certain circumstances is in distress. He added that a widow is one who finds herself in the middle of the ocean of life, struggling to survive. She becomes lost in thought and afraid of what the future holds in stock for her. Widowhood period is a critical period of confinement eroding loss of beloved husband or wife, aimed at surmounting courage to overcome shock and grief resulting from the loss. Kalu (1989) defined widowhood as the state of mourning the loss of one's husband or wife through death. He stated further that widowhood represents a life phase characterized by problems or loss which aged and young people experience.

Since death comes suddenly, people do not normally plan for it and one may not recover from the shock of the death of one's beloved throughout one's life if care is not taken, so widowhood is one of the most traumatic periods in the life of widows especially where widows do not get supports from the society. Widowhood according to Ijeoma (2005) is a phenomenon acknowledged worldwide to be the most traumatic event that can happen to anybody. And this is especially so in Nigeria and Africa where the natural pain is exacerbated by coercive traditional practices of the most dehumanizing, degrading and life-threatening mourning rites.

Widowhood is a reality for as long as people are born and people die. Widows are found in every community in Africa, especially in Nigeria. The experience of widow is such that women dread to be widows. Widows make up to about half of the adult female population in many African societies and they go through a lot of hardship that stems from the society, the husband's family and from tradition (Ijeoma, 2005). These hardship conditions include; economic hardship, emotional and social problems. So, widows pass through a period of loneliness which manifests in so many ways. They go through phases of bereavement which include, phase of numbing which is the immediate reaction to the loss of one's spouse, phase of yearning and searching, phase of disorganization and phase of re-organization (Oniye, 2000). In all these phases, the widow's companion is uncertainty. The case of older widows is even severer; this is because age itself as a factor has its own challenges which may further aggravate the problems of widowhood.

The problems arising from widowhood practices are numerous and multi-dimensional (Ijeoma, 2005). The most common problems experienced by the widows studied by Masagbor (2001) are deprivation, abandonment and the pain of false accusation. These problems pose a number of challenges which are economic, socio-psychological and health related (Mohapatra, 2011) to widows.

Nigerian widows like other widows across the world, belong to the downtrodden class, whose voices are mostly represented by Non-Governmental Organisations, civil society and human rights groups, who raise concern over the sordid conditions to which widows are subjected. However, Anugwom (2011) argues that in spite of the efforts by formal and informal agencies to alleviate the burdens of widowhood, the gender informed discriminatory practice of mourning which exacts a heavy toll on women persists. In this case, widows are exposed to harsh and often cruel mourning. Abdullahi (2014) equally

reports that the response by biological and distant relatives to assist widows is no longer spontaneous as it used to be.

The support system from clubs, associations or civil societies is not there as much. The only noticeable support is mainly moral. Consequently, widows have found it difficult to make the necessary social adjustments. Majority of widows depended on their husbands while they were alive and after their husband's death, they suffer from financial problems which they rate as the number one. Majority of these widows are still mentally attached to their deceased husbands and consequently cannot socially adjust since they are left alone to deal with economic demands and other daily challenges. The social welfare systems are not well equipped to handle these disasters.

The above scenario calls for a re-awakening in addressing the challenges of widowhood in Nigeria in which non-formal practices are suggested. It is believed by scholars (Courtney, 1989) that non-formal education has capacity to address multitude of problems and challenges confronting youths and adults including challenges of widowhood. Non-formal education is meant to cover various socio-economic and educational needs of children, youth, and adults based on conditions prevailing in various environments, oriented to help them to improve their work, earnings, health, family life, behaviour, understanding of the natural and social surroundings. Thus non-formal education is broad in character, extensive in coverage and diverse in content, methods and participants. It is important to note that non-formal education goes beyond education as it takes care of welfares, social, economic, emotional, behavioural, other needs of underserved, including widows. In fact, it is need-based, participatory, multi-purpose, flexible and friendly. This might be the reason why non-formal education is seen by Courtney (1989) as an intervention into the ordinary business of life--an intervention whose immediate goal is change, in knowledge, in attitude, behaviour, in skill or in competence.

It is against this backdrop that this paper explores non-formal education practices in addressing challenges of elderly widows in Nigeria. To this end, the paper examines widowhood practices in Nigeria; challenges of widows; situational analysis of social support systems for widows and proposing innovative non-formal education practices for ameliorating widowhood challenges in Nigeria.

Widowhood Practices in Nigeria

Across different cultures in Nigeria, there exist harmful traditional widowhood practices which have subjected widows to miserable conditions. These traditions vary from one culture to another. For example, in Igbo land as in some other parts of Nigeria, widows are subjected to numerous hardships in an attempt to absolve them of guilt, they are shaved, kept in dark rooms for days with little or nothing to eat, sometimes they are made to sleep in the same room with their dead husbands and the water used in bathing the dead man is given to the woman to drink (Akujobi, n.d). In addition, a widow is expected to use sticks in scratching her body from time to time during the mourning period. Besides, she is restrained from washing herself. These practices are rooted in the

belief that every death is unnatural. Therefore, a widow must pass through these rituals to prove her innocence and purify herself and at the same time protect herself from further defilement (Okoye, 1995). At the death of a husband, the mourning period ranges from one week to a year with activities that differ from one community to another. In most Igbo communities, a woman is expected to dress in the mud cloth called “Ogodo Upa” for a period of seven days to a year depending on the emphasis of the community. In other communities, a woman is expected to wail three times a day or once in a day for three or seven days. In addition to the woman’s hair being entirely shaved she would sit on a mat surrounded by sympathizers and clad in black attire for seven months during the mourning period. Any attempt by the widow to contest this is met with stiff resistance and name-calling (Akujobi, n.d).

In the Northern region of Nigeria, attribution of death is to God and the widow traditionally is expected to mourn her late husband (tabaka) for a specified period. The mourning period is four lunar months plus ten days and till the day of delivery or weaning of her new baby for a widow that is not pregnant before the death of her husband and the pregnant widow respectively (Oniye, 2000). The woman observing the mourning is often placed under different restrictions such as not allowing to make conversation with people, not eating food prepared by other woman except those prepared by woman that have experienced about widowhood, not allow to bath regularly and not changing cloth all the time, to mention but few. Going by the predicament of the widow during widowhood period, the period constitutes the greatest source of psycho-social problems (Shaba, 1997).

Among the Yoruba of South-Western Nigeria, widowhood practices are generally characterized by human greed, superstitious beliefs and religion. In fact, widowhood in this region is an enduring period of deep-rooted agony, exclusion, anxiety, as well as a period of restriction, isolation, trauma, insecurity and pain (Afolayan cited in Genyi & Enuginia, 2013). During the mourning period which sometimes lasts for forty days or four months (120 days) the widow is expected to wear a pensive look and be clad in black attire to all public places. During the initial seven days of mourning, the widow is expected to sit on bare floor or a mat at best but definitely not on a stool or a bed. In some Yoruba communities, she is expected to eat from broken plates and cook with broken pots. At this period, it will be ascertained whether or not the widow is pregnant etc. At the end of forty days, three month or four month as the case may be, the final rites are performed for the widow after which she is free to remarry. These final rites 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 to final rest and the “outing”, which involves change of dresses and being led to the market (Fasoranti & Aruna, n.d).

The above review of widowhood practices across the country shows that the practices are similar and derogatory to the persons of widows. And this certainly poses some challenges to widows generally and elderly ones in particular which may put the rest of their lives in danger. These challenges are examined below.

Challenges of Elderly Widows in Nigeria

Widowhood, meaning loss of one's spouse whether early or later in life entails a lot of things, mostly problems for the bereaved. Its effects may even be worse when the bereaved is an elderly person. Ageing according to Mohapatra (2011) is a biological process and experienced by the mankind in all times. It is also a multi-dimensional process. Widowhood, an inevitable life event for many older women has an impact on their psycho-social status. Consequent upon widowhood, many older widows are vulnerable to the development of psycho-social problems and low self-esteem. Women in the later years of life have been subjected to many hardships like economic dependency, emotional insecurity, and social estrangement, especially due to loss of spouse. However, there are a growing number of elderly widows who are victims of the triple neglect and discrimination on account of gender, age and widowhood. Widowhood is both a crisis and a problem. In the suddenness and in the sea change that it wrought in the life of a woman, it is a crisis. As the woman tries to cope with the implications, it becomes a problem. Widows are prone to face social stigma and ostracism.

Widow identity also changes in the sense that it brings on an era of identity crisis. This is because the widows feel that the real essence of their being married has been lost by the death of spouses. Coping with this identity crisis depends to a large extent on the individual's capacity and will. For traditionally oriented women, the role of wife is central to their lives, structuring their lives not only in their households but also on the job and in answering the question 'who am I' and these women often put 'wife of' at the top of their lists (Atchley, 1996). Specifically, researchers such as Afigbo (1989); Fasoranti and Aruna (n.d); Oniye, (2000); Korieh (2005); Anugwom (2011); Mohapatra (2011); Genyi and Enuginia (2013) are unanimous that challenges of widows include socio-psychological, economic and health related. These shall be examined one after the other.

Economic rated Challenges of Elderly Widows

The Canadian Daily of July (2004) reported the result of a study on the economic consequences of widowhood. The study revealed that widowhood has a negative economic side. The study showed among others that: widowhood has a direct impact on the standard of living for senior women; median family income declined continuously among senior women who became widowed compared with married women. Genyi and Enuginia (2013) established that many Nigerian widows are pauperized by widowhood practices. These practices drastically reduce the economic status of widows upon the death of a husband. Long period of mourning with characteristic restrictions on movement and interaction restrains the poor widow from engaging in any creative income generating opportunities which may arise from initiating new social levels of interactions. Stereotyping plays a critical role in this process. Since some cultures deny women from inheritance, it is difficult to achieve a good life by a widow when she has no right to inheritance. Upon the death of a husband, widows may be completely dispossessed and chased off. Widowhood therefore deprives women of homes,

agricultural land and other assets. Manifestation of poor economic condition of widows in Nigeria include withdrawal of children from school and the adoption of coping strategies such as engaging in exploitative informal work, engaging the children in child labour and hawking, begging and sex work. In a number of cases, sex work is discretely undertaken but no doubt remains an option (Genyi & Enuginia, 2013).

The mostly seriously affected by poor economic conditions among widows are elderly ones especially if they are illiterate and of low socio-economic background. From the study of Mohapatra (2011) it was found out that elderly widows were having economic problems like increased medical expenditure, lack of freedom in spending, liabilities of children. Lack of support from families was reported by most of the respondents (73.8 percent). It was also noticed that half of the aged were mainly dependent upon others even for meeting their economic needs.

Socio-psychological Challenges of Elderly Widows

The harsh and often cruel mourning practices which widows are exposed to are tasking especially for elderly women who have to contend with frail physical health, loss of partners and the mental, psychological and physical stress of widowhood. Therefore, while these practices are norm oriented they expose the elderly widows to socio-psychological trauma (Anugwom, 2011). Socially, recognition and acceptance also pose a problem to widows because often times, widowhood in African societies goes with the erosion of social recognition. Widows often face problems of declining social recognition and acceptance after the death of their spouses and this can be linked to their losing their central roles of 'wife'. The likely erosion of social recognition and insurmountable loss which widowhood occasions, widows have often had to face socio-psychological challenges. These challenges result from both the societal attitude to widows and more crucially the psychological and even physical health of widows. The elderly people in the society are often stereotyped as lazy, wicked, hard to please disgusting, sickly and sometimes even diabolical (Korieh, 2005). This can be explained by the fact that they are viewed as burdens and distractions from one's immediate family and responsibilities. This situation becomes a challenge in addition to being widows.

Psychologically too, back pain, muscles cramp, vomiting, lump throat, blurred vision, singing and whispering attitudes, abdomen emptiness, hair loss, tenor voice, day-night-rhythms, feeling of separation from the deceased husband, hallucinations, feelings of guilt, debility, heightened hostility towards other people and restlessness are some psychological traumas suffered by widows especially the elderly ones. Other psychological problems suffered are tension, jitteriness, hopelessness, persistent, watery eyes, melancholy attempt to commit suicide in order to terminate life and unusual pattern of speech when speaking about the deceased husband (Ushe, 2011). These ambivalent behaviours are expressed by the widow as a result of preoccupation with ideas about the separated spouse which can easily lead to breakdown of emotions, psychaic-imbalance and ill-health if not properly handled. According to Atchley (1996) this stress can be manifested in the form of extreme anxiety, worries, frequent head-ache, high blood

pressure, insomnia, heartache and regular hospital visits precipitated by mainly by worry. No doubt that, these conditions can easily send widows early to their graves. This is because as depression sets in at the loss of a spouse a widow may feel that there is nothing to live for anymore.

Health Related Challenges of Elderly Widows

One of the challenges posed by widowhood practices in most of the less developed countries, Nigeria inclusive is health related problems. For example Mahajan (2006) reported that elderly people generally and elderly widows in particular suffer from general weakness and poor eyesight. Similarly, the findings of Krishnaswamy and Aghababa (2007) reported that ageing is a process when deterioration of cardiovascular system takes place and bones lose their mineral content which can easily lead to terminal health challenges of aged. In the case of elderly widows, Mohapatra (2011) reported that all the respondents have health problems. It is also observed that most of the respondents have more than one health problems (multiple health problems). The main health related problems among the sample elderly widows are reduced vision (81.2 per cent), hard hearing (48.12 per cent). It is worthwhile to mention that in old age eye problems are more prominent than the problems of ears among the elderly. The other serious health problems which sample elderly widows are facing are dental decay (77.5 percent), diabetes (65 percent), hypertension (65 percent), musculoskeletal system and connective tissue disorders (65 percent), disorder in circulatory system (43.8 percent), disorder in digestive system (23.8 percent), disorder in respiratory system (21.2 per cent) and heart attack (7.5 per cent). A multiple health problem like this as a result of old age couple with being widows is a bigger challenge that can easily make life miserable to elderly widows.

The realisation that the challenges of widows could affect the relatives of the widows and the larger society has prompted some efforts to cushion the effects. Some of these efforts are examined in the next section.

Examination of Support System for Elderly Widows in Nigeria

The plights posed by the death of one's beloved and widowhood practices as examined earlier indicates that widows need to be supported through well defined support systems. The common support systems such as economic, social and emotional supports enjoyed by widows in Nigeria and in other parts of African countries come from levirate system; relatives and friends; religious and civil society organisations; non-governmental organisations; and government. Unfortunately, the support systems have been bastardised, abused and improperly channelled, thus proven the systems ineffective in helping widows in their adjustment.

For example, levirate system is a system of marriage whereby a widow is seen as a part of inheritance to be married to a brother or another relative of her late husband. This tradition is common and sanctioned by Yoruba and Igbo traditions as a way of taking care of the widows and her children. Unfortunately, the system has been abused as male relatives of late husband turn widows to objects of sexual satisfaction and leaving

them as mercy of themselves. Nnodim, Ike and Ekumankama (2013) alluded to the fact that the levirate system of support enjoyed by widows of old has been recently criticized as a ploy to sexually exploit widows, especially the younger and beautiful ones. The authors further cited Encyclopedia of Death and Dying in buttressing the argument that widows in many African societies impregnated by the male relatives in the levirate culture were often deserted and thrown out of the family homestead.

African extended family system has also been seen as an important social safety net for widows in African countries including Nigeria. The system is such that children, members of the extended family and community members do provide care and support for elders. This responsibility of caring according to Fajemilehin (2000) for the old was seen as a collective responsibility and expectation of the entire society. Thus, upon the death of a husband, a widow relied on her children and members of the extended family for her well-being (Eboiyehi, 2013). The social relationship and structure of the extended family were such that they promoted closeness among members, thus reducing the problems of poverty and deprivation among elderly. The wellbeing of an elderly widow is often defined in terms of space (co-residence), material (e.g. provision of money and goods) or time (e.g. provision of household assistance or care) and transfers. Thus, co-residence between an elderly widow and her children or members of the extended family has remained an important source of support in the traditional African society. By this arrangement, their physical, economic, social and emotional needs were met through this informal network. Even when the widow has no surviving children, she was sure that other members of the extended family would give necessary support to ameliorate the plights of widowhood (Fajemilehin, 2000).

However, the intergenerational relationships as described briefly above are changing. What we find nowadays is that the elderly widows are currently among the most vulnerable and marginalized group in our society. Unlike in the past, they are now confronted with a quadruple danger of being old, poor, widowed and alone. In some cases the custom that was used to protect them in the past are now used to oppress and exploit them as majority of them are now being accused of witchcraft activities (Eboiyehi, 2013). For instance, in some communities, “chasing off” and “property grabbing” are common feature of widowhood as a widow’s husband’s brothers are greedy and deceitful as they deprive elderly widows of their homes, agricultural land and assets. Thus, the death of a husband means a loss of income and property that the deceased spouse received or owned.

Studies (such as Oniye, 2000; Nwadinobi, 2001; Nnodim, Ike & Ekumankama, 2013; & Abdullahi, 2014) have also shown that, a recourse to religious organization, social service agencies, government and non-government agencies could not help in providing the assistance necessary for widows to work their way out of grief or social security. Nwadinobi’s study revealed that no more than 40% of Nigerian population claim religious affiliation but only 3% of the newly widowed look upon their churches or clergy as a source of succor after funeral. Abdullahi (2014) also noted that the support system from clubs, associations or civil societies is not there as much. The only

noticeable support is mainly moral. Consequently, widows have found it difficult to make the necessary social adjustments. Majority of widows depended on their husbands while they were alive and after their husband's death, they suffer from financial problems which they rate as the number one.

On the part of non-governmental organizations support system usually come via advocacy, donations and skill acquisition trainings. This system seems to have been lopsided in favour of urban centres at the expense of rural communities where the conditions of widows seem to be severed. The study of Nnodim, Ike and Ekumankama (2013) indicated that supports from the non-governmental organizations were adjudged ineffective by the respondents. It is expected that through advocacy, skills training programmes scholarships and grants from NGOs could enhance the well-being of rural widows. It however, appears that their efforts were limited to urban centres. Many respondents could not recall when any organization had come to their aid. Similarly, Aborisade and Aderinto (2008) have reported that many non-governmental organizations involved in helping widows have often been accused of having more interest in the financial benefits that come from supporting local and international agencies, than true social service. Oniye (2006) also acknowledged that the religious organizations did not fare better either in support system to widows. The author's respondents complained that religious groups in the many communities lack the capacity for any meaningful support for widows. According to them, the religious organizations themselves depend on the poor people for sustenance. Though it was acknowledged that they do well in offering emotional and spiritual support and assist widows recover quickly from psychological and emotional stress when widowed.

Government supports to widows in Nigeria come in form of skill acquisition and occasional donation especially during the World Widows' Day. These supports sometime do not get to the widows as politicians do high-jack them. Aside, the refusal of government at different tiers to implement and enforce many of the legal instruments that could protect the rights and dignity of women was an indication that government efforts were not effective. However, Owasanoye (1997) recalled that it was the duties of governments to implement international obligations, introduce social security and enforce legislations against widows' maltreatment in the society.

The above scenario of abuse, improper channel and inadequacy of the support systems on one hand, and lack of promptness and lack of genuine intention on the part of those providing the support systems on the other hand call for attention and improvement in order to improve the effectiveness of the systems. These reasons among others, call for suggesting non-formal education practices to better addressing the plights of widows in Nigeria.

Non-formal Education Practices as a Panacea for Improving Support Systems for Widows in Nigeria

Non-formal education is known for having capacity to restore people's confidence as an intervention into the ordinary business of life-an intervention whose

immediate goal is change in knowledge, in attitude, behaviour, in skill or in competence (Courtney, 1989). This shows that non-formal education can serve well as a panacea for improving the support systems given to widows. This can be achieved with the following non-formal education practices:

Preventive Intervention Education Programme: There is no doubt that, the best form of any support is self-support. Oniye (2000) proved in his study that the development of useful support and adjustment strategies is dependent on certain factors which include, age, religious inclination, socio-economic status of the widow and her level of educational attainment. It therefore means many widows who found themselves at the lower rung of these criteria are automatically ruled out of any meaningful support and adjustment strategies. Many widows, especially those at the lowest rung of socio-economic ladder (the poor, illiterates and aged) could be best supported when they are personally empowered through **preventive** intervention education programme. This programme is provided to reduce the risk of psychological, social and physical morbidity in older widowed persons by promoting conditions in the pre- and post-death period that will foster the successful resolution of their mourning and adjustment to widowhood.

The objectives of the preventive intervention programme are based on universal bereavement tasks that span individual differences and promote the process of coming to terms with loss and moving forward with life (Walsh & McGoldrick, 1991). This process according to Raveis (1999) includes the following: accepting the reality of the loss (i.e., facing the reality that their spouse is dead), will not return and reunion is impossible; acknowledging and working through the emotional and behavioural pain associated with the loss; adjusting to an environment in which the deceased is absent (i.e., coming to terms with living alone, facing an empty house and managing various household tasks and finances on one's own); and withdrawing emotional energy from the deceased and reinvesting it in other relationships. Certainly, when prospective widows and real widows are prepared in this sense they will be self empowered to cope and adjust to widowhood life and moving on smoothly in life.

Communal Development Education: African people see themselves as members of the same family and a problem of a member is seen as a problem of all which must be collectively addressed. It is unfortunate that the spirit of communalism in African communities is gradually eroded and widows are badly affected. For example, a continuous decline in multi-generational family model, in which the number of elderly widows who lived as dependents declined, while the number of those who lived alone or in households with only elderly increased (UNFPA, 2007) has contributed to the weakening of the extended family and communal ties. This trend needs to be reversed in order to give needed support to elderly widows. This can be achieved through community development education which should focus on enlightening the larger community about powerful capacity of communalism in development of our communities, especially its potential in helping addressing the problems facing individuals when collective efforts

are taken. When communalism relationship is restored in our communities, elderly widows will continue to enjoy supports system from children, relatives, friends and other well intentioned individuals when needed.

Liberal Education: The excesses and abuse of levirate system can also be checked through liberal education. Liberal education is an important programme in Adult and Non-formal Education. This programme inculcates the spirit of human dignity in individuals. A person who sees himself as a human being and has a name to protect will not involve himself in an act of cruelty such as sexual and economic exploitation of widows.

Literacy and Continuing Education: Another important way of addressing the plight of widows is to provide opportunities for literacy and continuing education for appropriate widows. Since many widows, especially those at the lowest rung of socio-economic ladder (the poor and illiterates) lack literacy education opportunities, they can be assisted with literacy education precisely functional and conscientization to be able to fetch for themselves economically on one hand and fight for their rights socially on the other hand. The power of literacy is such that can make widows critic of conditions in which the traditions of society subject them to. In fact, when widows are conscientized through literacy for conscientization they can become aware of their rights and challenge governments (Federal, State and Local Government) at all levels to implement all the international obligations such as International Covenant on Economic and Social Right 1984, Covenant against Torture and punishment and the Declaration on elimination of violence against women. This could be a strategy of freeing women from the stranglehold of culture which reduces their chances of livelihood when widowed.

Focus Group Discussion: Widows should be encouraged to come together to form community based associations as a platform to attract attention from governments and other welfare agencies. This could serve as an important avenue to be easily identified and their plights recognized and attended to by welfare agencies and other well intentioned individuals. These associations can pressurise governments at all levels to institute social service schemes, through which widows could be economically supported through grants and monthly stipends to cushion the effects of widowhood.

Conclusion

The ineffectiveness of the support systems to addressing the plights of widows in Nigeria has been attributed to abuse and improper channel of the support systems to the target group. Erosion of communal ties, lack of adequate capacity of religious groups, lopsidedness of NGOs intervention and their lack of genuine interest and insincerity on the part of government at all levels to address the challenges of widows have further made the support systems more ineffective. To better improve the support systems in addressing the challenges of elderly widows in Nigeria therefore, non-formal education

practices such as self empowerment of widows through preventive intervention education programme; restoration of African communal relationship through community development education; literacy and continuing education opportunities and promotion of community based widows associations can be of greater advantage.

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