

Determinants of Hopelessness among Female Heads (Widows) of Households and their Hope Enhancing Initiatives: Implication for Home Economics

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Abstract

Single female headed households have become a fairly common phenomenon that is occasioned by some factors including widowhood. In some part of the developing world, including Nigeria, culture and traditional practices impose enormous challenges on female heads (widows) of households. In some situations, these women are dispossessed of their husbands property even those that were jointly acquired and owned. Thus, these women find it difficult to eke out living and care for their children. Many thus, wallow in hopelessness. They need to be helped to have hope. This study therefore, identified determinants of hopelessness among widows in a rural area of Ebonyi State. determined hope enhancing initiatives the women presently adapt. determined any novel initiatives the women could be helped to further adopt and ascertained the implications of for Home Economics practice in Nigeria. The study was a survey which was carried out in rural area in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Data were collected with questionnaire and through focus group discussion. determinants of hopelessness among widows in the study area, hope enhancing initiatives presently adopted by the widows, novel initiatives the women could be helped to further adopt and? Ways Home Economics can help out were ascertained from study. The achievement of the above will in no small measure enhance the wellbeing of these widows and their children and also X-tray the areas of focus of Home Economics.

Keywords:

Determinants,
Hopelessness,
Female heads,
Households,
Initiatives,
Traditional practices.

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Background to the Study

Households in Nigeria have experienced and are still experiencing situations where the headship of families is left in the hands of females. Females headed households occurs due to various factors such as voluntarily opting out as for single parents, divorce, both out, of wedlock or death of husband. The death of a husband will make a wife a widow and the head of the family.

Widowhood is the act of losing one's husband or wife to death. The loss of a husband by a woman makes the woman to be a widow. Akanle(2011), stated that widowhood is the state or period of being a widow or widower while a widow refers to a woman whose husband has died and who has not married again.

Widowhood is a period of pain, grief and trauma. This period is characterized by various challenges which infringe on the wellbeing of family members. These challenges faced by widows range from grief, deprivation of husband's property, accusation of being responsible for the death of the husband, poverty and its attendant consequences, loneliness to mention but a few. These challenges predispose these widows to traumatic experiences which in turn affect their physical, psychological and emotional disposition. Stroebe, Stroebe & Schut, (2001), observed that widowhood plays a significant role in poverty which provokes important life changes. In his own statement, (Hurd, 1990) stated that the issue of poverty is particularly troublesome for widows since they have fewer possibilities to recover from a drop of income.

Most of these widows continue to struggle so as to make ends meet and see that the family wellbeing is not hampered by the exit of the husband. Prolonged struggle to see to the welfare of the family may make a widow to go into psychological or emotional trauma which leads to depression, despair and loss of hope. Loss of hope or hopelessness is a state of feeling by an individual that nothing will turn out right for the one. It is the feeling of inability to actualize one's life goals. This can degenerate from loss of hope to some psychological or mental disorder. Shin, Yutaka, Shigeki & Toshinori (1996) defined hopelessness as a psychological construct that underlies a variety of mental disorder which has been hypothesized to be an etiological factor in depression. These widows engage themselves in various activities to help themselves out of these situation. They go into doing some dehumanizing and menial jobs just to help themselves and their families. The need to help them overcome these challenges should be the concern of Home Economics.

Home Economics which is a course of study that is geared towards wellbeing of individuals and society should brace up with these challenges and come up with solutions. Lemchi, Ezema & Iloeje (2016), noted that Home Economics is a broad discipline, whose central theme is the wellbeing of individuals should, helping them to attain a useful and satisfying life and be self-reliant. For Home Economics to rise up to these challenges, researches, advocacy, teaching, counseling and other activities should be undertaken in order to give hope to those widows. Despite the move by international and national bodies to eliminate discrimination against women and any form of violating of their rights, no

mention is made of widows specifically. This situation calls for evolving ways of helping these widows come out of these problems. It is based on this scenario that the researchers set out to ascertain determinants of hopelessness among female heads (widows) of Households and their enhancing initiatives and its implication for Home Economics.

Purpose of the Study/Objectives of the Study

The main purpose/objective of this study was to ascertain the determinants of hopelessness among female heads (widows) of households and their hope enhancing initiatives and implications for Home Economics.

The study specifically ascertained the following:

1. Determinants of hopelessness among widows in rural area of Ebonyi State of Nigeria.
2. Hope enhancing initiatives presently adopted by these widows
3. Any novel initiative the widows could be helped to further adopt.
4. The implications of the above three (3) objectives for Home Economics.

Four research questions in line with the objectives of the study guided this study.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed descriptive survey design which adopts methods of interviews and questionnaires to elicit opinions, information, perception and people's attitude about phenomena. This research design was used by this study because it elicited opinions of widows and Home Economists on determinants of hopelessness and their hope enhancing initiatives. Home Economists' opinions were sought on how they could help ameliorate the challenges faced by these widows.

Area of the Study

The study was carried out in rural area of Ebonyi state of south East Nigeria.

Population for the Study

The population for the study is made up of all the widows in the rural areas of Ebonyi State and Home Economists, in institutions that offer Home Economics. A target population of 58 widows and 25 Home Economists formed the population. The entire population of 83 was used for the study given that the number was not much.

Instrument for Data Collection

A structural questionnaire developed by the researchers was used in data collection. The questionnaire was divided in four sections according to the objectives of the study. The responses to the questionnaire items were based on four point rating scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). Home Economist and literate widows were given copies of the questionnaire to respond to while focus group discussion was used for 40 non literate widow. The discussion group was made up of 10 widows per group.

Data Collection

Twenty five copies of the questionnaire were administered to Home Economists and eighteen copies to literate widows by direct contact. Retrieval of the questionnaires was done in the same way and all the 43 copies of questionnaire were collected back. Forty widows of 10 per group constituted the respondents for the focus group discussion. Data collected from questionnaire items and focus group discussions were duly analyzed.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics of mean was used in analyzing the data. A mean of 2.50 was used as bench mark for decision making for each item. Any item with a mean of 2.50 and above was considered acceptable by respondents while any mean below 2.50 was considered unacceptable by the respondents. Statistical package for social science (SPSS) version. 22.0 was used for all the computation (SPSS, 2013).

Results

Forty-three respondents completed the questionnaire while 40 were involved in focus group discussion giving a total of 83 respondents. The mean ratings of both the widows and Home Economist on each of the questionnaire items were computed. The results are presented in tables in line with the four research questions that guided the study.

Research Question1

What are the determinants of hopelessness among female heads (widows) in rural area of Ebonyi state?

Results in Table 1: Reveal that all the 10 items on determinants of hopelessness among widows were considered indicators of hopelessness by the respondents. This is so because all the items had mean rating above 2.50 which is the benchmark for accepting or rejecting an item. Items 2 and 6 seemed to be major determinants with means of 3.87 and 3.85 respectively.

Table 1: means rating of respondents on determinants of hopelessness among widows in rural area of Ebonyi state

S/N	Determinants of Hopelessness among widows	\bar{x}	Decision
1	Grief	3.044	Accepted
2	Accusation of killing the husband by husband's relatives	3.87	"
3	Poverty	3.65	"
4	Childlessness	3.80	"
5	Loneliness	3.65	"
6	Deprivation of husband's property.	3.85	"
7	Doubling as Father and mother	3.50	"
8	Belief that nothing will get better	2.95	"
9	Depression/despair	3.02	"
10	Feeling of emptiness	2.88	"

\bar{x} = mean

Research Question 2:

What are the hope enhancing initiatives presently adopted by these widows?

All the seven items in Table 2 show that the respondents agreed to the fact that there are activities they engage in presently to enhance their hopes. All the seven items outlined had a mean above the benchmark of 2.50. Working for people in their farms and working as labourers in building sites with means of 3.88 and 3.84 respectively were hope enhancing initiatives presently adopted by these widows.

Table 2: Respondents Mean rating on hope enhancing initiative presently adopted by these widows.

S/N	Hope enhancing initiatives presently adopted	\bar{x}	Decision
1	Farming- working for people in their farms	3.88	Accepted
2	Working as labourer in building sites	3.84	"
3	Petty trading (Hawking)	2.65	"
4	Sending out children as house helps	2.73	"
5	Baby sitting for people	2.52	"
6	Street begging	2.55	"
7	Prostitution	2.50	"

\bar{x} = mean

Research Question 3

Is there any novel initiatives the widows could be helped to adopt?

In Table 3" The respondents agreed that all the five items on novel initiatives could help in enhancing their hope. Their means are above 2.50. Item 2-giving of non interest revolving laon and skill acquisition having very high ratings of 3.85 & 3.92 respectively.

Table 3: Respondents Mean Ratings on novel Initiatives. The Widows could be helped to adopt.

S/N	Novel Initiatives	\bar{x}	Decision
1	Formation of widows' Association	3.20	Accepted
2	Giving of Non-interest revolving loan	3.85	"
3	Having family insurance scheme	3.00	"
4	Acquiring Skills in a given trade/craft	3.92	"
5	Embarking on thrifts (Isusu)	3.05	"

\bar{x} = mean

Research Question 4:

What are the implications of the above 3 objectives/research questions for Home Economics?

Table 4 shows that the three objectives in tables 1 to 3 have implications for Home Economics with mean rating ranging from 3.55 to 3.80 which are above the benchmark of

2.50. The items with the highest means are items 2 and 1 with means of 3.80 and 3.77 respectively.

Table 4: Mean ratings of respondents on the implication of hopelessness and hope enhancing initiatives of widows in rural area of Ebonyi State.

S/N	Implications for Home Economics	\bar{x}	Decision.
1	Advocacy	3.77	Accepted
2	Education/Training	3.80	"
3	Research	3.56	"
4	Counseling	3.82	"
5	Documentations	3.60	"

Discussion

The finding of this study indicate that widows go into hopelessness, this fact is evidenced by the high means response of the respondents on the determinants of hopelessness among widows in the area of study. The ten determinants of hopelessness listed in the study recorded high means above the benchmark of 2.50. This is an indication of acceptance by the respondents. Ushe, (2011), observed that widowhood is the most devastating state of life which requires coping capacities and social adjustment to make life better in the society. Accusation by husband's relatives of the woman killing the husband and deprivation of husband's property were rated very high by the respondents as major determinants of hopelessness. These two items had high means of 3.87 and 3.85. Respectively many widows according to (Ushe, 2011) are suspected by family members of deceased husband. When a husband dies suddenly, the relatives of man's first reaction is to find out from the woman what killed their own and may end up alluding to the fact that the woman was responsible for the death of their brother. The woman in order to prove her innocence may be subjected to dehumanizing practices by the husband's relatives. Also, ones a husband dies, the preoccupation of the relatives is to cater away the man's property while the woman is still mourning. Worst still is when the woman has no issue or male issue.

With respect to hope enhancing initiatives presently adopted by widows, the respondents rated working for people in their farms high with a mean of 3.88. the reason for the is not far fetched because the people of Ebonyi state are known mainly for farming and it is easy to see farmers who could engage the services of these widows in their farms. This helps the widow earn some money which will put food on their tables and also take care of other needs in the family.

The results revealed that the most accepted novel initiatives which these widows should be helped to adopt was acquisition of skills by these widows with a highest mean of 3.92. this is an indication that possession of skills will only not make these widows to be self reliant but will also keep them busy. According to Ochagha (1995), one of the surest ways through which people find their way into the labour market is through skill acquisition in various trades.

The results showed five implications this study has for Home Economics. The five items outlined in the study had high mean ratings above 2.50 with counseling the widows having the highest mean of 3.82. This implies that Home Economist should have a counseling unit where they can talk to widows so as to meet their psychological and emotional needs. The reason is for these widows to overcome the psychological and emotional trauma they go through during the period of widowhood. This trauma if prolonged can lead to depression and in extreme cases suicide. Ede (2007) reported that women experience socio-psychological trauma, subjected to harmful health practices, economic exertion and deprivations. Regarding counseling (Agomoh, 1987) noted that traditional grief counseling is a cultural method of assisting men and women who lost their loved ones to readjust to new situation of things in the society. In his own view, (Mascoritz, 1973) stated that traditional grief counseling is a therapeutic way of giving traditional advice to bereaved people concerning the death of their departed ones. Thus Home Economics extension workers can effectively render this service to the rural communities where these widows reside. Other ways Home Economics can help out includes advocacy, education by way of training in skill and creativity. Home Economics teacher should instill this creativity in these women. They should carry out more research on the plights of widows and evolve strategies for ameliorating their plights. These will in no small measure help them to be hopeful and enhance their wellbeing.

Conclusion

Widows in Ebonyi State as in any other Igbo land are faced with a lot of challenges which affect their social, emotional and psychological wellbeing. In the quest to wriggle out of these problems they engage in different menial and dehumanizing activities, such as weeding in peoples farm for money serving as labourers in building sites, going into prostitution etc.

These widows should be helped by Home Economists by coming up with new initiatives that will help them overcome the trauma widowhood come with. Most of the cultural practices are not friendly to these widows and as such advocacy by Home Economist should be that they will bring to lime light the damages these practices do to these widows to the knowledge of policy makers in the rural areas. Home Economists should counsel them and also teach them some entrepreneurial skills that will help them earn their living. All these will help their wellbeing and at the same time give them hope for living.

By using what is in their environment to teach them. Ukoh-Aviomoh (2005) pointed out that to teach creativity, teachers should use a variety of instruction materials and techniques engage in services of research in order to be adequately equipped to deliver their lessons creatively and provide learners with opportunity to learn beyond the classroom.

Recommendations

- a. Home Economists should employ the novel initiatives identified by this study in giving or enhancing the hope of these widows.

- b. Home Economist extension workers should go to the gathering of women in the rural areas and talk against some traditional practices meted against widows.
- c. Widows should be encouraged to take up a trade instead of staying ideal.

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