Demographic Variables as Indices of Emotional Adjustment of Widows in Enugu State: Implication for a Suitable Life Adjustment

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The study determined some demographic variable as indices of emotional adjustment of widows in Enugu state. Three research questions and a hypothesis guided the study. The subjects were 200 widows made up of 100 younger and 100 older widows. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire. Mean score and *t*-test statistics were used for data analysis. Result indicated that emotional adjustment strategies for widows include: not depending solely on others for survival, interacting freely with people, and not remembering the death of a husband with regret among others. Widows' perception of emotional adjustment strategies to widowhood was dependent or influenced by age and academic level. The implications of the finding were highlighted, and then recommendations are made and conclusion is drawn.

Keywords: counseling, special education, emotional adjustment

Introduction and Background

Across societies and cultures, the institution of marriage commands a high social regards and the wish of every couple is to spend their life time together for a long time if not forever. However, at a particular period in their lives, the cold hands of death take away the life of one of them leaving the other either as a widower or a widow. A widower or a widow is a man or woman who has lost his or her spouse through death. Oniye (2000) described widower as a man whose wife has died but who has not remarried and a widow as a woman whose husband has died and who has not remarried.

A widow is a woman who lost her husband and has not remarried. Oniye (2000) noted that the death of a husband who is supposed to be the bread winner of the family exposes the widow to lots of financial, social, sexual, physical, and emotional difficulties. Thus, a widow is one who finds herself in the middle of the ocean of life struggling for survival. This is because with a man's death a provider's vacuum is created in the family. As Olokoi (1997) observed, nature did not create or construct human beings to be alone and those who have never known the deep intimacy and companionship of happy mutual love have missed the best thing that life has to give or offer. Oloko's observation could clearly portray the agony of loneliness and emotional trauma which widows face after the death of their spouse as she may feel insecure and unable to easily adjust to challenges of life.

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The ability of a widow to overcome or not to overcome the emotional problems that follow the period of widowhood which is described as the time she is a widow could be functions of her personality traits or factors outside herself and the marriage. Her personality traits may include such factor like her age, level of education, social relationship with others, and her own personal economic status which she has built and still maintains. Factors outside herself and marriage may include traditional or burial rites she has to go through, protection and support got from family members, in-laws, friends and charitable organizations, as well as the circumstance surrounding the husband's death. Thus, for widows who poss those above attributes, coping or adjusting to widowhood may be easier, but for those who lack these, the anxiety, depression, and memories that accompany the shock of the death of their spouses linger on and the accompanying emotional trauma may take a longer time to overcome or adjust to.

Emotional reactions of widows, such as guilt and anxiety range among others come as a result of denial or loss of an essential partner, which created intimate, financial, moral, and social vacuum in their lives which they find hard to adjust to. Emotional adjustment according to Osarenren (2002), involves a person's awareness and the expression of an affective experience which may be pleasant or unpleasant. Oniye (2000) observed those needs and appetite heighten emotion and when needs are not met, frustration sets in and emotion arises. Thus, with the death of husband, a widow may encounter varied unanticipated physical and psychological problems unique to individuals and their environment. Thus, the speculation that demographic (personality) variables like age, location, and educational qualification of widows may relate with their emotional adjustment.

In line with this work, emotional adjustment of widows is viewed as a state of balance or equilibrium in their interactions with their external and internal demands. It deals with the idea of tension reduction and a process through which a person achieves satisfaction of needs thereby reducing tensions especially when the usual ways of meeting the needs are blocked or tight. Micheal (1990) defined it as an individual's general adaptation to his/her environment and the demands of life such as the ways he/she handles his/her responsibilities and deals with stress.

Lots of emotional experiences may accompany widowhood. Saba (1997) observed that the emotional effects of widowhood on women are of two folds which are the initial emotional reactions coming inform of outburst of cries and grief; and secondly, a long-term effects which are accompanied by a drop in economic well-being of the women because men are traditionally bread winners and providers. Saba further stressed that these emotional reactions are more intense in younger widows than in older ones due to the enormous responsibility of taking care of children alone.

Apart from age, there are other factors that could relate to widows' emotional adjustment to widowhood. Porcino (1985) observed that these factors may include the circumstances surrounding the husband's death, the widows' social standing in the society, her economic status, and the personality of the widow. For instance, a highly dependent woman may find it hard to shoulder the responsibility of the family alone. However, a high level of self-esteem and optimism on a widow's part may assist her to get off the grief and adjust easily to widowhood.

Emotional adjustment of widows could also be related to location or widows' residential area. Owosanoye (1997) observed that given the features and life patterns in the cities (urban area), widows are more likely to adjust easily than their counterparts in the rural area. For instance, in many traditional societies, Owosanoye stressed that chasing off and property grabbing from widows are the rules rather than exceptions. Corroborating

this, Oniye (2000) pointed out that there is belief in many quarters that widows are “chattels” who cannot inherit their husbands’ estate, rather they may be regarded as part of their husbands’ relations. Similarly, Olokoi (1997) added that widowhood rites, such as denial of basic comforts like baths, wearing of old garments, and restricted food habit are added sources of emotional traumas for widows especially those in the areas. Widows residing in urban area may not experience these rigorous rites and practices as they are exposed to modern ways of living and can easily challenge whoever attempts to trample on their rights carelessly.

Educational qualification of widows could also be a relevant variable to their emotional adjustment. One sure way to conveniently enter and remain in the modern sector labour force is by having appropriate training through education. In terms of career leading to good job, social respect, awareness of one’s right, and economic independence, good education is of paramount importance for everybody and for widows too. With education as a weapon, widow emotional stress and trauma may be averted because in the events of husbands’ death, the burden of both financing and protecting her life, the lives of her children, and the wealth of the family fall on her. Corroborating this, Osarenren (1998) noted that the serious decrease in the family income becomes a base for added difficulty in adjusting to widowhood. Looking at the events and circumstances surrounding widowhood, widow’s adjustment to widowhood may be difficult. This is because the situation of any widow could be influenced by her life as a wife and the circumstances before and after her husbands’ death. More so, it may be difficult to predict the emotional adjustment of any widow because adjustment at times could be related to such demographic variables like age, location, and educational qualifications. However, it seems that these variables are less researched on empirically. It is against this background that the researchers are poised to ask, the widow’s age, place of residence (urban or rural area), and their educational qualifications relate to their emotional adjustment to widowhood?

Research Questions

This study was guided by three research questions:

- (1) What are the emotional adjustment strategies for widows?
- (2) To what extent do emotional adjustment strategies of widows depend on age?
- (3) To what extent do emotional adjustment strategies of widows depend on academic level?

Hypotheses

One hypothesis guided this study is: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings based on age on the emotional adjustment strategies of widows to widowhood.

Method

The design of the study was a survey. The population comprised all the widows in Nsukka urban area of Enugu state. A purposive random sampling technique was used to draw 200 widows as sample for the study from three churches in Nsukka urban area regardless of widows’ age and educational qualification.

The instrument for collecting data was researchers’ constructed questionnaire in line with the variables of the study and the information gotten from literature review. The questionnaire is made up of two parts: Part one dealt with widow’s bio-data, while Part two sought information on behaviours that constitute emotional adjustment strategies among the widows. The instrument is a 4-point rating scale measure of “Strongly agree”, “Agree”, “Disagree”, and “Strongly disagree”.

The face validity of the instrument was determined by giving draft copies to three experts in field of marriage and family counseling, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The reliability of the instrument was determined in a preliminary survey among widows in a location outside the study area. As the data were analyzed to ascertain the internal consistency Cronbach Alpha. A reliability coefficient of .78 was reached.

Copies of the instrument were distributed to the respondents personally by the researchers using the widow leaders as research assistants. Mean scores and *SD* (standard deviation) were used to analyze the data collected to answer the research questions while *t*-test statistical method was adopted to test the only hypothesis posed for the study.

Results

Research Question 1 sought to determine the mean responses of widows on strategies for emotional adjustment. From Table 1, it could be observed that among the 19 items, nine items (7, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19) were rated above the criteria mean of 2.50, while the remaining (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 12) were rated below the criteria mean of 2.50. These items show that not taking disappointment so keenly, not disturbed by criticism and gossips, content and happy as others are, among other items as indicated in their mean scores are not perceived as emotional adjustment strategies to widowhood for widows. The findings were based on the cluster mean score of 2.47 and *SD* of 0.88.

Research Question 2 sought to determine perception of emotional adjustment strategies of widows based on age. The results presented in Table 2 show that both younger and older widows with mean scores of 2.47 and 2.27 respectively perceived emotional adjustment strategies to widowhood alike. The implication is that they did not differ significantly in their perception of the strategies.

Table 1

Mean Responses of Widows on Strategies for Emotional Adjustment to Widowhood

S/N	Item description	Mean	<i>SD</i>
1	Not taking disappointment so keenly	1.94	1.31
2	Not disturbed by criticisms or gossips	2.15	1.56
3	Inclined to taking things easy and calm	1.95	1.30
4	Do not allow important thoughts to bother me	1.89	2.27
5	Not easily get tensed up and jittery	2.10	1.42
6	Content and happy as others seem to be	2.14	1.50
7	Interact freely with people	2.56	1.56
8	Keeping to problems till they are solved	1.97	1.40
9	Confidence that I must survive no matter the present condition	2.14	1.47
10	Approaching people for advice and clarifications when the need be	2.11	1.98
11	Not depending on people for survival	2.82	1.55
12	Believing in my potentials to succeed in life	2.24	1.49
13	Not remembering the death of my spouse with regret	3.20	1.38
14	Being friendly with people even my husband's relations	2.96	1.56
15	Relaxed when carrying out my family responsibilities	2.92	1.62
16	Feeling cool and composed even when there are likelihood of problems	2.90	1.61
17	Not easily provoked to anger	2.83	1.57
18	Coping easily with inadequate resources	3.22	1.41
19	Having good regard for people around me	2.95	1.64
	Cluster mean	2.47	0.88

Table 2

Mean Responses Based on Age on Perception of Emotional Adjustment Strategies of Widows

Age	Frequency	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD
1–35 years old	100	2.47	0.88
35 years old and above	100	2.27	0.86

Table 3

Result of Mean Responses on Academic Level on Perception of Emotional Adjustment Strategies of Widow

Academic level	Frequency	Mean	SD
Maximum of school certificate	100	2.42	0.86
School certificate and above	100	2.37	0.81

Research Question 3 focused on finding the perception of emotional adjustment strategies of widows to widowhood based on academic level. Results of Table 3 show that, both the highly educated and non-highly educated widows did not differ significantly in their perception of emotional adjustment strategies to widowhood. This is because with the mean scores of 2.42 and 2.37 for widows with maximum of school certificate and those with above school certificate respectively, which shows that both of them perceived emotional adjustment strategies alike.

Table 4

Result of the T-test Analysis of Significant Difference of Mean Rating Based on Age on the Perception of Emotional Adjustment Strategies of Widowhood

Group/Age	($\bar{X}$)	SD	No.	df	t-cal.	t-crit.		Remake
1–35 years old	3.20	0.75	100	198	3.0	1.96	0.05	Rejected
35years old and above	3.50	0.93	100					

The results in Table 4 show that t -calculated of 3.0 is greater than t -critical of 1.96 at 198 degree of freedom. Based on the results, the conclusion drawn was that the hypothesis of no significant different in the mean ratings based on age on perception emotional adjustment strategies of widows to widowhood was rejected. The implication is that age is a factor in the widows' responses.

Discussion and Recommendations

The study was guided by three research questions and a hypothesis which focused on widows' perception of emotional adjustment strategies to widowhood, the extent emotional adjustment strategies of widows depend on age and the extent emotional adjustment strategies of widows to widowhood depend on academic level. The results of the research questions showed that the emotional adjustment strategies as perceived by widows include: interacting freely with people, not depending on people for survival, not remembering the death of their spouse with regret, being friendly with late husband's relative, relaxed while carrying out their home duties, feeling calm even when there are likelihood of problems, not easily provoked to answer, having good regard for people around them, and coping easily with inadequate resources. Furthermore, the results show that both young and old widows perceived emotional adjustment strategies alike. Equally, the results show that both the highly educated widows and those with low level academic qualifications perceived emotional adjustment

strategies alike. This implies that age and academic qualification are factors in the respondents' responses to emotional adjustment strategies of widows to widowhood. The findings are in line with Wiebo (1987) as well as McGlosen and O'Byrant (1988) that widows' adjustment to bereavement is a function of her personality trait, socio-economic status, and socio-cultural opportunity. Also Rooks (1987) observed that the functions of support system to widows include restoring widows' confidence and sense of belonging often accomplished through the availability close and intimate relationship between the widow and the significant others in her life.

Oniye (2000) also observed that the predominant influence of such factors as widows' material background, her age, level of education, level of deprivation in widowhood, and subsequent support systems are great in alleviating the sufferings of widows. The findings of this study seem to buttress the belief that socio-cultural factors as well as socio-personal factors do influence widows' challenge of widowhood which invariably constitutes elements of deprivation to her. This situation, according to Babangida (1988), makes widowhood a pathetic situation and widows as people lost in the ocean of life without clear picture of what the future holds for them.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The implications of the study are that widowhood especially in Nigeria is a pathetic situation due to its element of deprivation, lack of support, and lack of resources to survive. However, there are areas or patterns of adjustment available for widows. This implies that when such patterns or strategies are adequately utilized, widows will live a well-adjusted life. Thus, the challenge to guidance/family councilors to sensitize the society—government, widows, and opinion leaders to truly integrate widows into the main stream affairs in the society. There is therefore the need for adequate information on adjustment strategies especially emotionally as there is disagreement on their perception of the emotional adjustment strategies which was indicted by the result of the study.

Consequent upon these, implications that the paper recommends among other things are that:

- (1) Government should provide functional basic education to the citizens to adequately prepare them for meeting the challenges of future;
- (2) Younger widows, that is, those bereaved before the age of 35 years old be encouraged to re-marry if they find it hard to cope or adjust;
- (3) Counselors in training should be made to take bereavement and widowhood counseling in their training programme to adequately fortify them to provide needed integrative counseling to people with special needs in our society such as the widows.

Conclusively, it is important to note that how a widow adjusts to widowhood influences the quality of life and how she views future. It has been discovered that age and educational background as factors in emotional adjustment and sustainable life adjustment have long been ignored. These made this study imperative.

This study was limited by the fact that most of the respondents were unwilling to react to the questionnaire. They only filled the questionnaire after much convictions and pressures. This made the ascertaining of accurate information on the emotional adjustment strategies as identified by the widows inefficient. The researchers then suggest such areas for further research.

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