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THE NEED FOR SOCIAL SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR WIDOWS AMONG THE BEROM OF JOS SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper examined the need for social support system for widows amongst the Berom tribe in Jos-South Local Government Area of Plateau State. The support system was viewed under the sources, nature and frequency of support. The population of the study was the entire widows in the area of study while a sample size of one hundred (100) widows was purposively drawn from both the urban the rural areas. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and a structured questionnaire was use for data collection, while frequency counts and percentages were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that Berom widows in Plateau State received support mostly from individuals and religious groups. The support they received was mainly social, emotional and material which came infrequently Recommendations made were that government at all levels should institute social support programmes in which the widows could be economically empowered

through grants and monthly stipends in order to alleviate their problems. The widows should also form associations as a platform to attract attention from government and other welfare or significant agencies as they are among the vulnerable populations in the country. When widows are not properly supported, they are not only a problem to themselves but also to their family and the society at large.

INTRODUCTION

There are peculiar problems that are faced by widows when their husbands die. Usually, the widow is the first suspect. Sometimes she is forced into a confession of a crime which she is not part of and if the widow refuses, she will be flogged by some elderly women. These elderly women are usually widows themselves and at this point they would recall their terrible experiences and try to revenge.

Widowhood is not something that any woman looks forward to but it is often inevitable and unpredictable and when death strikes and robs a woman of her husband, she remains a widow as long as she did not re-marry. Death comes like a heavy blow or bomb. Ugwu (2003), sees a widow as a woman who is not re-married after the death of her husband and the period which she remains unmarried, is regarded as widowhood. Oniye (2007), describes a widow to be a woman who has lost her husband and has not remarried.

The challenges of widowhood are many and range from running the family as a single parent, providing for the children, if they are younger and acting as a model for them. Nwaozuzu (2014) opined that when a man who is the pride of a woman dies, she is exposed to all forms of maltreatments, for example wearing one type of cloth for one year and shaving her hair while mourning the dead man, She further explains that most widows hope and become despondent because they have no supporter, money or provider. This has great effect on the mental and physical health of widows.

Nwadinobi (2001) asserts that unfortunately, the death of a woman's husband would automatically expose the widow to many difficulties which include financial, social, physical, sexual, emotional and societal challenges. In the same vein, Nwaozuzu (2014) has likened a

woman's husband to a roof over a house and once that roof is removed, rain falls into the house, sun shines into the house and all manner of things enter the house unhindered. Therefore, when the head of the family is taken away, the trauma is unexplainable psychologically, emotionally, physically, and mentally for the wife, children, dependents and loved ones. It could be said here that nobody wishes to be a widow nor takes on widowhood as a title or enjoys being called a widow, but it happens all the same. It is a fact of life.

According to Saba (1997), widowhood could result in the decline of family income and lead to lower self-esteem, insecurity and feelings of inadequacy among the children of the widows. This is why in those Biblical days, when the numbers of the disciples were multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution (Acts 6: 1 KJV).

In our society today, social support scheme for widows is non-existent. Widows seem to depend on other support and adjustment systems made available by nature or traditions Oniye (2008) is of the view that some widows especially the poor ones need support to maintain a basic life style. This support can come from many sources such as family, friends, neighbours, co-workers, organizations, and government among others. Rooks (1987) in a study believed that any support given to a widow is to restore her confidence and improve her sense of belonging to the society, and can often be accomplished through close and intimate relationship between the widow and significant others in her life.

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 (Oniye, 2000). If proven, it therefore means that many widows who are found at the lower rung of these criteria are automatically ruled out of any meaningful support and adjustment strategies.

Widows who are not properly supported and adjusted can become a problem to themselves, family and the society at large.

According to 1Kings 4:1 and the Holy Quran 4:24, religiously, it is the expectation of the husband to provide financial and other support for the wife to the extent that the wife may be completely dependent on the man. Thus, with his eventual death, a provider's vacuum is created which by implication necessitates the provision of such support by well-defined networks. Filling this vacuum is necessary in order to alleviate the attendant suffering of the widows, who often become confused, helpless and frustrated (Sanders, 1980).

For any support system to be effective, Oniye (2007) states that it must meet at least four conditions such as being adequate and proportional to perceived needs and timing; must be appropriate and prompt; must be genuine without any degrading or insulting conditions attached and practicable in it structure. He further noted that there are four broad support systems available to widows among the three ethnic groups in Nigeria - Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa which are economic, social and emotional.

It is against this background that this paper seeks to determine the level of need for social support systems for the widows amongst the Berom tribe in Jos — South Local Government Area of Plateau State.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In general most widows are faced with many challenges in our society. Because of the position of the woman in patriarchal societies many women depend on their husbands for the upkeep of the home. Even if the woman is financially independent, there are many other areas in which she needs support to maintain her emotional, psychological and social status quo.

Therefore, some of the problems of widows in order of priority include financial/economic hardship, absence of husband's will resulting to the loss of property to husband's relations, loneliness and depression, poor relationship with inlaws, difficulty with social interactions, and poor housing among others. Thus, this

paper seeks to examine the need for a social support system for Berom widows in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State that will cater for their emotional, financial and psychological needs.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To guide the researchers, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the major sources of social support to Berom widows in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State?
2. What is the nature of support received by Berom widows?
3. How often do Berom widows receive support in Jos — South Local Government Area of Plateau State?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. A survey research is one in which a group of people or items is studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people considered to be a representative sample of the entire population (Emaikwu, 2006). The descriptive survey as employed here is aimed at collecting data and describing the data in a systematic manner based on the characteristics or facts about the needs for social support system for Berom widows in Jos South Local Government Area. The population for the study comprised all the Berom widows in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State.

A sample size of one hundred (100) Berom widows comprising 50 rural and 50 urban widows was drawn through purposive sampling technique since there was no focus group of widows.

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided grouped into three areas covering the three research questions on the sources, nature and frequency of support system given to Berom widows. The questionnaire had twelve (12) items with response options of "Agreed" "Disagreed", "Always" and "not Always". The instrument was trial-tested by applying it on ten (10) members of the population who were not chosen as samples to check the validity and areas of difficulty were corrected.

However, the instrument was administered to the respondents by the researchers in their various homes, work places and religious gatherings. For those widows who could not read, the questionnaire was read and interpreted to them by the researchers. A total of one hundred (100) questionnaires were given out and all were duly returned because of the face to face method of collecting data used. The data collected were analyzed using frequency count and simple percentages.

RESULTS

The results of the analysis of data collected to answer the research questions are hereby presented and discussed.

Research Question I

What are the major sources of support to Berom widows in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State?

Table 1: Sources of support of Berom widows

Variables	Agreed	%	Disagreed	Respondents
Individual support	60	60	40	40
Government support	20	20	80	80
Religious support	70	70	30	30
Non-governmental organizations(NGOs)	45	45	55	55
Family support	65	65	35	35

N = 100

Table I shows that out of one hundred (100) Berom widows studied, 60 (60%) agreed that they receive support from individuals, while 40(40%) disagreed. Also 20 (20%) agreed that there was government

support than while 80 (80%) disagreed. For the religious group, 70 (70%) of the widows accepted that they receive support from them, while 30(30%) did not accept. However, 45 (45%) of the widows agreed that they received support from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) while 55(55%) disagreed. None the less, 65(65%) of Berom widows agreed that they get support from their families while 35(35%) disagreed. The findings therefore revealed that Berom widows in Plateau State receive their support from individuals, religious groups and family members.

Research Question 2

What is the nature of support received by Berom widows?

Table 2: Nature of Support received by Berom widows

	Respondents			
Variables	Agreed		Disagreed	
Financial support	48	48	52	52
Social support	75	75	25	25
Emotional support	52	52	48	48
Information support	38	38	62	62
Materials support	78	78	22	22

N = 100

The result of the nature of support received by Berom widows on Table 2 indicated that 48 (48%) of the widows received financial support while 52(52%) did not. For social support, 75(75%) agreed while 25(25%) did not agree. Also, 52 (52%) agreed that they receive emotional support while 48 (48%) disagreed. More so, 38 (38%) received informational support while 62 (62%) did not. However, 78(78%) of the Berom widows received materials support while 22 (22%) responded they did not. It is clear from the table that Berom widows receive support on social, emotional and material support. Other forms of support such as finance and informational were not significant.

Research Question 3

How often do Berom widows receive social support?

Table 3: Frequency of support for Berom widows

Opinion	Responses	Percentage
Always	10	10
Not always	90	90
Total	100	100

Table 3 established that out of the total Berom widows studied, 10 (10%) responded that they receive support always while 90 (90%) said not always. This implies that it is not always that the Berom widows receive support. The support may be occasional or during festive periods only.

Discussion

Based on the result of the data analysed, it was shown that Berom widows in Plateau State receive their major support from individuals, religious group and family members, followed by NGOs and government. These findings support the view of Oniye (2008) who explained that some widows especially the poor widows need support to reduce their problems and that the support may come from many sources such as family, friends, neighbours, organizations, government among others. This view is also in line with Rocks (1987) who asserted that any support given to widows is to restore their confidence and improve their sense of belonging and that such support is accomplished through friends, family members and significant others of the widows.

Furthermore, from the findings on the nature of support received by Berom widows, it was evident that social, emotional and material support were received. Other forms of support such as finance and information were insignificant. This is why Nwadinobi (2001) asserts that unfortunately, the death of a woman's husband would definitely expose the widow to lots of difficulties such as financial, social, physical, sexual, emotional and societal challenges. This also supports the view of Oniye (2007) who opined that there are four broad support systems available to widows which are economic, material, social and emotional.

The findings on how often Berom widows receive social support shows that it is not always that they receive support. The support they received could be occasionally or during festive periods only.

CONCLUSION

Having concluded the study, it was observed that Berom widows receive support occasionally from spirited individuals, religious organizations and family members. The support is mainly social, emotional and material. These forms of support were neither adequate nor timely enough to cushion their needs. This is why in Biblical times when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists that their widows were neglected in the daily distribution (Acts, 6:1). When widows are not properly supported, they are not only a problem to themselves but also to the family and the society at large. It is on this note too that the International Widows Day officially was introduced on June 23, 2010 by the United Nations to address poverty and injustice faced by widows and their children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the paper recommends among other things that:

1. Government at all levels should institute social support programmes through which widows could be economically empowered through grants and monthly stipends to alleviate their problems.
2. Widows in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State should form associations as a platform to attract attention from governments and other welfare agencies as they are among the special populations in the country. This is the only way they could be easily identified, recognized and attended to by welfare agencies and other well spirited individuals.
3. Vocational training centres in various aspects of trade should be established in all local governments in the country for young widows to be trained for

   free in order to enable them become self— reliant.
4. The government at all levels should try to provide functional basic education free for young widows to adequately prepare them for meeting the challenges of widowhood.

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