

**DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC ADJUSTMENT OF
YOUNG WIDOWS IN THE NORTH-EAST SENATORIAL DISTRICT, AKWA
IBOM STATE, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, demographic variables of level of education, number of children and occupational status are studied as they influence socio-economic adjustment of young widows in the North-east Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The post-hoc survey design was used. The population consisted of young widows drawn from the Widows of Great Hope Initiatives (WOGHI), Akwa Ibom State Chapter. The group has a population of 142 young widows, aged below fifty years. The census sampling technique was used to pick participants for the study. Three research questions and corresponding null hypotheses were raised to provide direction for the study. Data were obtained by using a researcher-developed instrument, a four-point Likert-type questionnaire that sought information on respondents' biographic data on number of children they had, highest educational level they attained, occupational status and socio-economic adjustment. Data were analysed using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and tested at .05 confidence level. Results indicated that while level of education and occupational status significantly influenced the respondents' socio-economic adjustment the number of children they had did not. It was recommended among others, that to enhance the potential capacity of women to cope with socio-economic challenges and negotiate for inclusion therein, in the society, government and non-governmental organizations should avail more women, especially widows, educational opportunities through adult education and lifelong learning programmes.

**KEYWORDS: Demographic Variables, Socio-Economic Adjustment, Young Widows,
North-East Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.**

INTRODUCTION

The death of a spouse usually alters the partner's status into that of a widow for a woman and widower for a man. In either case, the experience is often very traumatic and at times, impossible to comprehend. This pain was once expressed by Rita Marley, the wife of a veteran reggae artist, late Robert Nesta Marley, popularly known as Bob Marley, in a song titled 'Who feels it knows it' (Akinbi, 2015). Her words were not just about her own bereavement experience, but also a reflection of the experience most widows often suffer. Akinbi further notes that widowhood is usually characterized by pains and degradation especially when poor and powerless widows are badly treated and exposed to embarrassing degradation and hardship by the society.

In many societies, including Akwa Ibom State, widows sometimes go through dehumanising hardships that stem from obnoxious socio-cultural practices often endorsed by greedy family members. In most instances, widows pass through harsh bereavement phases

which include, numbing, yearning, searching, disorganization and re-organization (Akinbi, 2015). In all of these phases, the cases of young widows may even be more severe. This is because at a very tender age, the young woman may desire to remarry and settle down, but may face the challenge of a tradition that insists she marries the late husband's brother, especially when she does not want to.

Widowhood Adjustment

A young widow may be described as a woman below the age of fifty years who had lost a husband and remains unmarried. According to Oniye (2016), the demise of a husband, who is generally considered the head and breadwinner of the family, opens the widow to serious financial, social, physical, emotional, and even sexual challenges that were never anticipated. This can be compared to being lost in the sea with no place to go, as the death of the spouse often leaves a vacuum in the life of not only the bereaved spouse but also the entire family left behind. According to Olokoi (2017), human beings are gregarious by nature and are born to live and co-exist in social groups with other individuals. As a result, widowed persons often find themselves exposed to extreme loneliness and emotional distress thus making them unsafe and incapable of dealing with challenges in life.

Kaori (2019) noted that when widows are denied rights to inheritance, they become marginalised, discriminated against, and develop low self-esteem. In many societies, beside loss of certain rights, the attitude towards widows is often negative. Widows in many societies are often exposed to violence, stigmatisation and discrimination. In some instances, they are usually denied access to the spouse's property, and made vulnerable to frustrating challenges and hardship. Such circumstances often result in mental and physical health deficits that expose them to more stress, possible depression and difficulty in effective adjustment.

Adjustment has been defined by Winga *et. al.* (2017) as the adaptation of the individual to the demands of the environment. This study, looks at socio-economic adjustment of young widows. Socio-economic adjustment of widows, in the context of this paper, refers to a complex process through which young widows endeavour to cope with emerging social and economic challenges they face consequent upon the demise of their spouses. It involves a multifaceted process that encompasses the widow's ability to manage financial responsibilities, rebuild and maintain social relationships, and emotionally adapt to life without a partner.

Socio-economic adjustment plays a significant role in the life and survival of a widow. Incompetency in coping with the social and economic demands of the new status can cause problems to the widow, her family and the society in general. According to Saba (2017), the effects of widowhood on women often take two forms, the immediate impact that is expressed through grieving and mourning and the long-term effects that are usually associated with decreasing economic resources to sustain the family. He also notes that the emotional impact is worse in the case of the younger widow, who shoulders the great burden of taking care of children all alone.

Demographic Variables

Observations tend to suggest that ability of widows to cope with their conditions can be influenced by their demographic characteristics. Such variables as identified in this study

are educational status, the number of children they have, and their employment status. Educational status covers the highest schooling level the widow would have attained, the certificates she would have obtained, her literacy potential and her employability prospects. Education is a very important foundation in assisting women to gain entry into and maintain jobs or even go into entrepreneurship. The current labour market and economic situation make education a strong requisite for relevance in the labour space. For an educated widow to appreciate her net value, understand the path to follow for social acceptance, articulate her rights, and drive her economic pursuits and independence, her level of education must be worthwhile. Sound educational attainment will also help to make her transition out of widowhood easy and in a manner that does not heavily tax her emotional and psychological well-being. Ekweme and Obi (2021) found that women with higher levels of education exhibit greater emotional resilience and financial adaptability after bereavement than those with low level of education. Educational qualifications can therefore, help widows to find employment that can assist them to provide for their families, attain economic stability and obtain enhanced social status. Asadu and Egbuche (2020) in their findings, associate women who had higher education with negative perception of widowhood practices.

In most societies, children are regarded as very precious assets. In the context of African communities, marriage is often considered a reproductive strategy for the perpetuation of the family and the society (Azogu, 2015). Hence, women are often viewed primarily as child bearers and this, in turn, defines how valuable women are to their husbands. Those who do not have children are often pitied, ridiculed and despised as they are believed to have no value (Omeje *et. al.*, 2011). The consequence is that most women prioritise child bearing over every other consideration. In such situations, where the number of children is high, the widow may experience serious economic challenges when the spouse is deceased. This situation explains why some childless widows may experience little or no pressure from her spouse's family, because they see her as no threat as she may not be entitled to anything her late husband left behind, since she has no child.

The number of children a family possesses therefore can affect the capacity of the widow to provide for them. Adeyemo (2015) found that children of widows were often neglected and uncared for, and that the number of children did not significantly influence their adjustment to widowhood. Ogunyemi and Adebayo (2017), Ekweme and Obi (2021) found that widows with more children were more financially independent due to collective family contributions. Williams and Brown (2018) studied the effect of number of children on the mental health of widows and found that widows with fewer children were at higher risk of depression due to limited social interaction. Ekundayo (2018) also found that widows with fewer children experienced higher stress levels due to loneliness than those with more children. Ahmed and Patel (2019) found that widows with more children experienced better social support and reintegration. Okafor and Adeyemi (2020) found that widows with more children had diversified income sources and greater financial stability than those with fewer children. In all these cases, the ages of the bereaved children also matter.

Occupational status can also play a major role in widows' socio-economic adjustment. Occupation entails a service one provides to humanity to earn a living. Occupation is a crucial determinant in intergenerational avoidance of poverty because it is one of the major factors of the socio-economic status of an individual. In this paper, occupational status is identified in the contexts of being self-employed, or working for others, whether in the private or public

sector. Tayo *et al* (2016) found no significant relationship between occupational status and the observance of widowhood rites. Essien *et. al* (2020) found that most widows relied on informal businesses and petty trading, often making less than a dollar a day. For widows who were working before the demise of their spouses, adjustment may be slightly easy as they may continue with the job although the income may now be inadequate.

Reasonable occupation would also afford the widow some form of psychological relief and sense of relevance, even if the income may be low. There is also a wider chance of independence when the widow is engaged in independent income-generating activities and this is essential to enable her resist oppressive and exploitative widowhood practices. Income, in this analysis, means the total amount that the widow earns on a monthly basis whether in wages, salaries, business, or any other source of livelihood.

Statement of the Problem

Widows frequently go through sufferings due to social and familial cultural beliefs characteristic of the environment they find themselves. Such challenges are usually obvious through social deprivations and mental pressure arising from stigmatisation and social isolation. Loneliness among widows often exact serious psychological toll on their mental health. In Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, typical problems include unfounded accusations, economic vulnerability occasioned by reduced income, and possible dwindling health. In some communities, widows are usually sidelined such that human rights groups and civil society organisations often take responsibilities to make their plights known. Typically, many widows usually struggle to survive with very little help from the society or close family members. Since the assistance from public organizations, community organizations, or civil societies is usually not adequate, most widows usually fail to attain the social, emotional and mental adjustment levels needed after the demise of their spouses. With many women struggling to survive even when husbands are around, the demise of their spouses often exposes them to more serious economic challenges, leaving them at risk of acute socio-economic pressures. Many women who had been overly dependent on their partners mentally, psychologically and economically often find it hard to reasonably adjust after the demise of such partners. Sometimes, such situations often result in serious sicknesses and possible deaths.

Purpose of the paper

This paper sought to find out differences in socio-economic adjustment of young widows in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District, Nigeria based on their demographic variables of educational status, number of children and employment status. Specifically, this paper sought to determine the:

- i. Difference in socio-economic adjustment of young widows based on level of education.
- ii. Difference in socio-economic adjustment of young widows based on the number of children they had.
- iii. Difference in socio-economic adjustment of young widows based on their occupational status.

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses guided the study, and were tested at .05 confidence level:

- i. There is no significant difference in socio-economic adjustment of young widows based on level of education.
- ii. There is no significant difference in socio-economic adjustment of young widows based on number of children.
- iii. There is no significant difference in socio-economic adjustment of young widows based on occupational status.

Methodology

The ex-post facto design was adopted for the study. The researchers surveyed existing situation by using researcher-developed instrument to obtain data from the targeted population in the study area. The design was more appropriate since young widows' level of education, number of children, occupational status, were all pre-existing variables as at the time of the study. The study was conducted in the North-East Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State. The district has nine local government Areas which are Ibiono Ibom, Itu, Uyo, Uruan, Ibesikpo Asutan, Nsit Ibom, Nsit Atai, Etinan and Nsit Ubium. Uyo Local Government area hosts the capital city and administrative seat of the State and is central to the burgeoning urban centres, thus attracting the development of civil societies and emerging non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that mobilized and sensitised a number of groups to their welfare needs. One such group is the Widows of Great Hope Initiatives, Akwa Ibom State Chapter (WOGHI, 2025). The group has a population of 142 young widows, aged below fifty years. The census sample was drawn from this group for the study. All 142 young widows registered with the organisation participated in the study since the population was accessible, and manageable to make the findings more precise.

The researchers developed an instrument titled Socio-Demographic Variables and Socio-Economic Adjustment of Young Widows Scale and used it to generate data for the study. The instrument had two sections, A and B. Section A was designed to elicit information on socio-demographic variables of the young widows such as highest educational qualification, number of children, and occupational status while Section B had 20 items which measured socio-economic adjustment of young widows. The items were measured on a four-point rating scale, using Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. To determine the reliability of the instrument, 20 copies were tested on 20 young widows in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District who were not registered with the NGO. Data obtained were analysed using the Cronbach Alpha statistic. The overall reliability index of 0.73 was obtained from the analysis. The instrument was administered during the monthly meetings of members of the NGO. Out of the 142 members, only 128 returned their own copies of the questionnaire while 14 could not. The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyse the data and test the null hypotheses.

Results

Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in socio-economic adjustment of young widows based on level of education.

Table 1. Summary of One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) on difference in socio-economic adjustment of widows based on level of education

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2525.165	3	841.722	10.4	.000
Within Groups	9990.140	124	80.566		
Total	12515.305	127			

Source: Field survey.

From the analysis in Table 1, the F-value was found to be 10.4 and significant at .000 confidence level with 3 and 124 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis was rejected because this p-value was less than .05. This means that significant differences existed in socio-economic adjustment of young widows based on their levels of education. Based on this finding, a post-hoc test to determine areas of differences was carried out using the least square difference (LSD) test. The result is as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: LSD post-hoc analysis of differences in socio-economic adjustment of Young widows based on level of education.

Educational Qualification (I)	Educational Qualification (J)	Mean Difference (I – J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Ph.D.	Master's Degree	7.75000*	3.47633	.028	.8694	14.6306
	First Degree//HND	13.27097*	3.05876	.000	7.2168	19.3251
	FSLC/SSCE	16.17778*	3.20850	.000	9.8272	22.5283
Master's Degree	Ph.D.	-7.75000*	3.47633	.028	-14.6306	-.8694
	First Degree/HND	5.52097*	2.30819	.018	.9524	10.0895
	FSLC/SSSC	8.42778*	2.50324	.001	3.4732	13.3824

1 st Degree/HND	Ph. D.	- 13.27097*	3.05876	.000	-19.3251	-7.2168
	Masters' Degree	-5.52097*	2.30819	.018	-10.0895	-.9524
	FSLC/SSSC	2.90681	1.88079	.125	-.8158	6.6294
FSLC/SSSC	Ph.D.	16.17778	3.20850	.000	-22.5283	-9.8272
	Master's Degree	-8.42778*	2.50324	.001	-13.3824	-3.4732
	1 st Degree/HND	- 2.90681	1.88079	.125	-6.6294	.8158

Source: Field survey

From the table, it can be seen that significant differences exist when comparing scores of those with Ph.D. with the scores of those with Master's degree (Sig. = .028), those with First Degree/HND (Sig. = .000), and those with FSLC/SSSC (Sig. = .000). Significant differences are also noticed when scores of those with Master's degree are compared with those of First Degree/HND (Sig. = .018), and FSLC/SSSC (Sig. = .001). Based on these findings, it was inferred that educational level of the young widows had significant influence on their socio-economic adjustment in the study area.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in socio-economic adjustment of young widows based on number of children.

This hypothesis was formulated to determine the differences in socio-economic adjustment of young widows in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District based on the number of children they had. The analysis of data was done using the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistic. The result is as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) on differences in socio-economic adjustment of Young widows in the study area.

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	293.473	2	146.736	1.50	.227
Within Groups	12221.832	125	97.775		
Total	12515.305	127			

Source: Field survey

From the figures in Table 3, the F-value was found to be 1.50 and significant at .227 confidence level. The p-cal. of .227 was found to be greater than .05 when compared at 2 and 125 degrees of freedom. Based on this finding, the null hypothesis was retained. This finding means that no significant differences existed in socio-economic adjustment of the young widows based on the number of children they had. This finding suggests that the number of children possessed by the young widows had no significant influence on their socio-economic adjustment.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in socio-economic adjustment of young widows based on occupational status.

Hypothesis 3 was formulated to determine differences in socio-economic adjustment of young widows in the study area based on their occupational status. The analysis of data was done using the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistic. The result is as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Summary of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) on difference in socio-economic adjustment of widows in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District based on occupational status

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	868.213	2	434.107	4.65	.011
Within Groups	11647.091	125	93.177		
Total	12515.305	127			

Source: Field survey

From the analysis in Table 4, the F-value of 4.65 was found to be significant at .011 confidence level. This calculated level of significance was less than .05 when compared at 2 and 125 degrees of freedom. Based on this finding, the null hypothesis was rejected. This finding suggested that occupational status had significant influence on the socio-economic adjustment of young widows in the study area. Based on this finding, a post-hoc test to determine areas of differences was carried out using the least square difference (LSD) test. The result is as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: LSD Post-hoc analysis of differences in socio-economic adjustment of widows based on status of employment.

Occupational status (I)	Occupational Status (J)	by	Mean Difference (I – J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Self Employed	Employed others		-4.44142*	1.90448	.021	-8.2106	-.6722
	Unemployed		2.12593	2.33507	.364	-2.4955	6.7473
Employed others	Self Employed	by	4.44142*	1.90448	.021	.6722	8.2106
	Unemployed		6.56735*	2.37247	.006	1.8719	11.2628
Unemployed	Self Employed		-2.12593	2.33507	.364	-6.7473	2.4955
	Employed others	by	-6.56735*	2.37247	.006	-11.2628	-1.8719

From the analysis, it can be seen that significant difference exists when comparing scores of those who are Self Employed with the scores of those who are Employed by Others (Sig. = .021). Significant difference is also noticed when scores of those who are Employed by others are compared with that of those who are Unemployed (Sig. = .006). Based on these findings, it can be inferred that employment status of the young widows had significant influence on their socio-economic adjustment in the area.

Discussion of Findings

Level of Education and Socio-Economic Adjustment

The finding that socio-economic adjustment of young widows differed based on their level of education agrees with the findings of Ekwueme and Obi (2021), who found that widows who have attained higher levels of education adjusted much better, both emotionally and financially to widowhood. This was so because education helped to improve coping techniques, stimulate resilience and makes livelihood opportunities relatively available. The finding of this study does not however, agree with that of Ajah (2019) who, in the study of factors affecting social adjustment among widows in Ebonyi State, Nigeria, found that level of education was not important in determining social adjustment of widows. Ajah argued that

formal education qualification was largely dominated by community rules concerning socializing, kin groupings and cultural apprehension.

The finding that level of education significantly contributed to variation in socio-economic adjustment of young widows supports the fact that education plays a critical role in empowering women so that, in the event of loss of a spouse, they can be in a better position to recover and improve their lives. Education enables a person to acquire necessary skills, knowledge, and self-efficacy to deal with some challenges in the society, make sound decisions and easily access available support services. Highly educated widows tend to have better chances to find employment, use money properly, and become easily integrated into the community, as a process of socio-economic adaptation. Additionally, education helps to build self-confidence and independence, as a widow tries to reinvent herself, and lessen family network interference.

Number of Children and Socio-Economic Adjustment

The finding that there is no significant difference in socio-economic adjustment of young widows based on the number of children they had challenged a commonly held assumption that possession of more children naturally increased the burden of dependents for widows. The present finding does not therefore agree with that of Ogunyemi and Adebayo (2017) who found that widows with more children enjoyed fewer income dependences than those with fewer children. The finding does not also agree with that of Williams and Brown (2018) who found that widows with fewer children were at higher risk of depression due to limited social interaction. While Ekundayo (2018) found that widows with fewer children experienced higher stress levels due to loneliness than those with more children, Ahmed and Patel (2019) found that widows with more children experienced better social support and reintegration. Okafor and Adeyemi (2020) found that widows with more children had diversified income sources and greater financial stability than those with fewer children. In many traditional societies, children are considered a form of social and economic insurance, particularly in widowhood. However, this may depend on whether such children are still dependants who require care, education, feeding, and shelter, thereby increasing the financial and psychological pressure on the widow. Where widows lack stable income or support networks, having more children to care for, could instead become a source of hardship rather than support. The leverage appears to be that it is not merely the number of children that matters, but their developmental stage, economic productivity capacity, and level of emotional maturity.

Occupational Status and Socio-Economic Adjustment

The fact that socio-economic adjustment of young widows varies significantly across occupational status points to the paramount importance of good job in the life of widows to make it manageable after the death of a spouse. Occupational engagement helps to create a reliable source of income; it also helps in giving one identity, sense of purpose, and belongingness. In as much as a widow earns in terms of employment, she feels better placed in handling her needs and those of her family members including, but not limited to, food, education, shelter, and healthcare of the dependants. Work is also the source of social and emotional balance, therefore, easing a holistic adaptation. Furthermore, paid work raises self-

esteem and independence and lowers poverty subsistence by the widow, parents, and the general community members.

The finding in this study is in line with that of Ogunyemi and Adebayo (2017) who found that occupational status positively contributed to the independent management of finances among widows in Nigeria. They stressed that occupational participation not only positively influenced income, but also the psychological well-being and social inclusion. On the other hand, the finding of the present study does not agree with that of Tayo *et al.* (2016) who found no significant correlation between occupation and the outcomes of widowhood practices. They argued that cultural prescriptions and community expectations carried more weight in depicting the experiences of widows than their employment status thus indicating that socio-cultural environment may at times outweigh the benefits of employment in widowhood adjustment.

CONCLUSION

From the findings of the study, it was concluded that educational and occupational status of young widows have great roles to play in socio-economic adaptation of young widows. The number of children they possessed may not have a significant impact in their socio-economic adjustment but their educational status would certainly offer them opportunities for social connections, enhanced capacities for entrepreneurial engagements and prospects in job search.

Guidance and Counselling Implications

The existence of the widows in the society suggests a need for counsellors to create programme space for their needs. Specially designed counselling intervention programmes, based on the peculiar characteristics and needs of widows need to be put in place for them. Young widows may need socio-emotional support, survival skills, information on job and entrepreneurial opportunities and capacities to cope with the demands of widowhood challenges. Intervention on these needs should be carefully designed and delivered to this population through planned and focussed activities by professional counsellors. For this purpose, collaboration with care-giving and supporting agencies, which may be governmental or non-governmental, becomes very essential for counsellors to explore and utilise.

Apart from the widows themselves, individuals or members of the society directly or indirectly affected by widowhood, also need information and education on widowhood management. This the counsellors can also provide using focussed activities aimed at creating awareness and sensitising the general population to the needs of widowhood and ways to manage them. Fora should be created for such programmes to be mounted for the people.

Career counselling services can also be rendered to help widows and even their children to identify career opportunities, develop employable skills, and set achievable personal goals for themselves. There is need for Counsellors to help young widows to build self-efficacy and resilience, while also providing parenting support where necessary, especially for those raising young children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Government and non-governmental organizations should avail more women, especially widows, educational opportunities through adult education and lifelong learning programmes to provide them access to literacy programmes, skill acquisition initiatives and socio-emotional development. This will increase their potential to handle economic decision-making, negotiate socio-economic inclusion in their communities and effectively cope with the challenges of living in spite of their conditions.
2. Support programmes in the society should be initiated and modelled to accommodate widows irrespective of their social status. Hardship alleviation programmes should, as a matter of government social policy, be intentionally designed for widows and their children in the society. This may include provision of basic survival needs like food items and accommodation where such challenges emerge. This will not only help to mitigate their pains but also assist them and their children to effectively cope with the demands of living without the head of the family.
3. Long term support programmes for widows should include capacity building through skill acquisition programmes and exposure to entrepreneurial opportunities through which they can create wealth and support themselves and their children.
4. A comprehensive data base should be created in every local government area to document existing widows and their needs so that support programmes can be guided by empirical statistics. This means that directorates for widowhood affairs may be needed at the state level to oversee the welfare of widows, including gathering data on their number, characteristics and needs.
5. A percentage of available employment opportunities should be reserved for widows so that they can be assisted to provide support for their children. Employment and vocational training of the widows based on individual capacities should be encouraged by the government and community development agencies.
6. Professional counsellors need to develop special intervention counselling programmes to assist widows and people affected by widowhood to obtain information and skills in the accommodation and improved management of widowhood needs in the society.

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