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Pains and Challenges of Widowhood in Adamawa State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of the study was to investigate the pains and challenges of widowhood in Adamawa State, Nigeria. The data was collected through the use of questionnaires and oral interviews. Data generated were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results show that, majority of widows in Adamawa State are still young and sexually active with high reproductive tendencies that are within the age brackets of 20-30 (46.3%). Margi tribe had the majority (22.7%) widows who are mostly Christians (49.3%) with tertiary educational level of 31% and entrepreneurship of 37.3%. It was gathered that, 36.0% of widows had their marriage lives full of joy and happiness with high future expectations before the death of their husbands. The results also show that, 56.0% of the widows suffer greatly in processing the benefits of their deceased husbands. The findings show different levels of maltreatment experienced by widows across the state. It has been established that, at the initial stage of widowhood, most widows go to the cold shell of their homes to fight loneliness. Thus, the study would be of immense benefit to widows who are in need of practicable opportunity to reduce their pains and challenges. This is imperative, because the age-long cultural conception of marital expectations now seems inadequate for present day widows who have to grapple with new and multiple roles of breadwinning, physical protection, custodian of societal morality as well as caring, feeding and educating their children (most times all alone). The findings would be useful to the government, scholars, policy makers and opinion leaders in matters related to widows. Above all, professional counselors could benefit from the study in playing their roles as crisis managers and providers of relief materials to widows. On the basis of this awareness, counselors would be adequately equipped to counsel the widows, their in-laws, their relatives and significant others in the life of widows on the pains and challenges of widowhood. Public policy on poverty alleviation must seek to address the concerns of widows as a special vulnerable group. One way of doing this is to raise awareness about the plight of widows and the fact that many more women at very young ages are becoming widows with many children to cater for with slim chances for a place in the marriage market. The state working in collaboration with women groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should evolve training programs to equip widows with skills in entrepreneurship so as to improve their economic status.

Keywords: Pains, Challenges, Widowhood, Adamawa, Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

The death of a husband is a tragedy that befalls a woman as it involves a physical break in their relationship and it is seen as a most stressful and devastating thing in life. A widow is a woman whose husband has died and who has not remarried. The term "widowhood" is the state of or period of being a widow (Asward, 1967; Agunwa, 2011).

The period after the death of a husband, is a time when everything should be done to assist widows to withstand the emotional and psychological trauma, pain and frustration associated with the loss and not to add to their problems. But, unfortunately, the reverse is the case by the African tradition. People chose to maltreat widows instead of helping to ease their problems so that they live a better life (Agunwa, 2011).

Widows rather than being sympathized with and assisted are subjected to near in-human treatment in certain traditional ritual rites and practices such as solitary confinement, defacement, dis-inheritance and a relatively long mourning period. The most obvious effects are deepening poverty, acute stress and depression, loss of identity and self-esteem. The widowhood condition exposes women to psychological and physical abuse as well as a whole range of health related problems including HIV/AIDs (Asward, 1967; Agunwa, 2011).

Widows, all over the world, face varying degrees of difficulties and untold hardships even though they tend to suffer in silence, in most cases. The problems range from obnoxious legislation which subdue women under male dominance to cultural practices and dis-inheritance which aggravate the poverty and social dis-empowerment of the widows. A widow remains an appendage of her husband's family. Her loss is unenviable, especially if she is young and childless, for she has no one of her own to turn to and her life is spent almost as an unpaid servant within the family (Asward, 1967). The painful loss of husband experienced

by the widow often leads to an inner dichotomy such as the constant reflection back to the memory of the happy past and the tragically altered picture of her lost happiness and her hopelessness regarding the future.

Afigbo (1989) emphasized that, bereavement is particularly stressful to a lot of widows because it is painful, humiliating and dehumanizing. In some situations the death means reduction in economic power and this leads to stressful conditions and uneasiness on the part of the widow.

Marriage exists as a socially recognized, durable, life-long relationship between the husband and wife. The mental adjustment of couples could be affected by death. Oniye (2000) reported that, death, especially that of a very close person, is often seen as an ultimate loss which invariably is accompanied by grief. Typically, the widow faces a lot of problems after the death of her husband (Wiebe, 1987). Widows are not well treated by the Nigerian society compared to widowers (Olusakin, 1998),

The widow is bound to experience various dimensions of stress, which constitute various stress levels in her life from then on. For example, lack of emotional support and financial assistance is a source of stress for the widow. The exclamation of Abdulsalam (1995) that, how do widows cope with life in the society which is ordinarily cruel to the weaker "sex" is justified. Abdulsalam (1995) noted that, after the burial of the dead husband, the widow undergoes a stressful decision of how to go through the mandatory mourning practices and widowhood rites and making a choice between re-marrying outside the husband's family or allowing herself to be inherited by a member of her husband's family.

A widow, from the perspective of her plight, is a person who by certain circumstances is in distress. Thus, she is one who finds herself in the middle of the ocean of life, struggling to survive. Widowhood has been discovered to aid manifestation of depression of post-traumatic

stress. Similarly incidence of coronary artery by-pass surgery is found to be more common among widows (Herman et al., 1993). This problem is caused by delay in going for necessary medical correction.

Widowhood is, also, associated with more intense grief and anger expression especially among widows as compared to the divorced (Kitson and Zynganki, 1987 and Oniye, 2000). In the opinions of Thomas and Shechan (1988), grief is more common among widows because of deprivation following loss of spousal intimacy through death. Apart from the divorced, widowhood is the greatest source of psychosocial deprivation for children of female-headed families.

It has been observed that, widowhood affects more women than men financially, psychologically, sexually and socially. Similarly, our traditional socialization which emphasizes dependence and passivity hinder women's attempts to adjust to widowhood and create a new life for themselves (Gbenda, 1997). Essential number of works have been carried out on the nature of widowhood and plight of widows in Nigeria. For instance, Olusakin (1998) wrote on gender inequality and the stress level, support system and adjustment strategies among widows in Nigeria while,

Agunwa (2011) investigated bad widowhood practices in Nigeria: adverse effects on widows. Again, George (2013) studied on widowhood and Nigerian womanhood: another context of gendered poverty in Nigeria.

It was observed from the works cited that, there is little or no literature on the pains and challenge of widowhood in Adamawa State, Nigeria. Thus, the main objective of this study is to investigate the pains and challenges of widowhood in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Study Area

Adamawa State is located at the area where the River Benue enters Nigeria from Cameroon Republic and is one of the six states in the North-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. It lies between latitudes 7° and 11° North of the Equator and between longitudes 11° and 14° East of the Greenwich Meridian (Mohammed, 1999). It shares an international boundary with the Republic of Cameroon to the East and interstate boundaries with Borno to the North, Gombe to the North-West and Taraba to the South-West (Adebayo, 1999; ASMLS, 2010a), as shown in Figure 1a.



Figure 1a: Map of Nigeria Showing Adamawa State

According to Adebayo and Tukur (1997), Adamawa State covers an area of land mass of about 38,741km². The state is divided into three Senatorial Zones (Northern, Central and Southern) which translates to three agricultural zones as defined by INEC (1996), which are further divided into 21 Local Government Areas (LGAs) for administrative convenience.

The State has a population of 2,102,053 persons (NPC, 1990). The main ethnic groups in the state are the Kilba, Higgi, Quadoquado, Lala, Yungur, Bwatiye, Chamba, Mbula, Margi, Ga'anda, Longuda, Kanakuru, Bille, Bura, Yandang, Fali, Gude, Verre, Fulani and Libo (Adebayo & Tukur, 1997; Adebayo, 1999; ASMLS, 2010b). The dominant religions are Christianity and Islam, although some of its inhabitants still practice African traditional religions. The major occupation of Adamawa people is farming. The soil type is ferruginous tropical soils of Nigeria based on genetic classification of soils by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO, 1996).

The soils are a function of the underlying rocks, the seasonality of rainfall and the nature of the wood-land vegetation of the zone. The soils are derived from the basement complex, granite and gnesis that form the ranges of mountains. The mineral resources found in the state include iron, lead, zinc and limestone (Adebayo & Tukur, 1997).

The common relief features in the state are the Rivers Benue, Gongola, Yadzaram and Kiri Dam, Adamawa and Mandara mountains and Koma hills. The state has minimum and maximum rainfall of 750 and 1050 mm per annum and an average minimum and maximum temperatures of 15^oC and 32^oC, respectively. The relative humidity ranges between 20 and 30% with four distinct seasons that include early dry season (EDS, October – December); late dry season (LDS, January – March); early rainy season, (ERS, April – June) and late rainy season (LRS, July – September), according to Adebayo (1999). The vegetation type is best

referred to as guinea savannah (Areola, 1983; Adebayo & Tukur, 1997). The vegetation is made up of mainly grasses, aquatic weeds along river valleys and dry land weeds interspersed with shrubs and woody plants. Plant heights ranges from few centimeters (short grasses) to about one meter tall (tall grasses), which form the bulk of animal feeds.

Cash crops grown in the state include cotton and groundnuts, sugarcane, cowpea, benniseed, bambara nuts and tiger nuts, while food crops include maize, yam, cassava, sweet potatoes, guinea corn, millet and rice. The communities living on the banks of rivers engage in fishing, while the Fulani and other tribes who are not resident close to rivers are pastoralists who rear livestock such as cattle, sheep, goats, donkeys, few camels, horses and poultry for subsistence (Adebayo & Tukur, 1997; Adebayo, 1999).

For the purpose of this study, three local government areas, one from each of the three senatorial districts in the state, were chosen. The local government areas were purposively selected to cut across the state. The study areas include Mubi-North (northern senatorial district), Gombi (central senatorial district) and Jada (southern senatorial district), as shown in Figure 1b. **Study Design**

Descriptive survey approach was adopted for this study because the research was interested in finding out the perception of widows' pains and challenges across Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Study Population

The target population are widows from the three senatorial districts of Adamawa State, Nigeria (i.e Northern, Central and Southern). The sample was drawn from three local government areas one from each of the senatorial districts of Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Sample Size

The total population of interest for this study was 1480 widows, and the enrolled sample size from the total population was 240 widows.

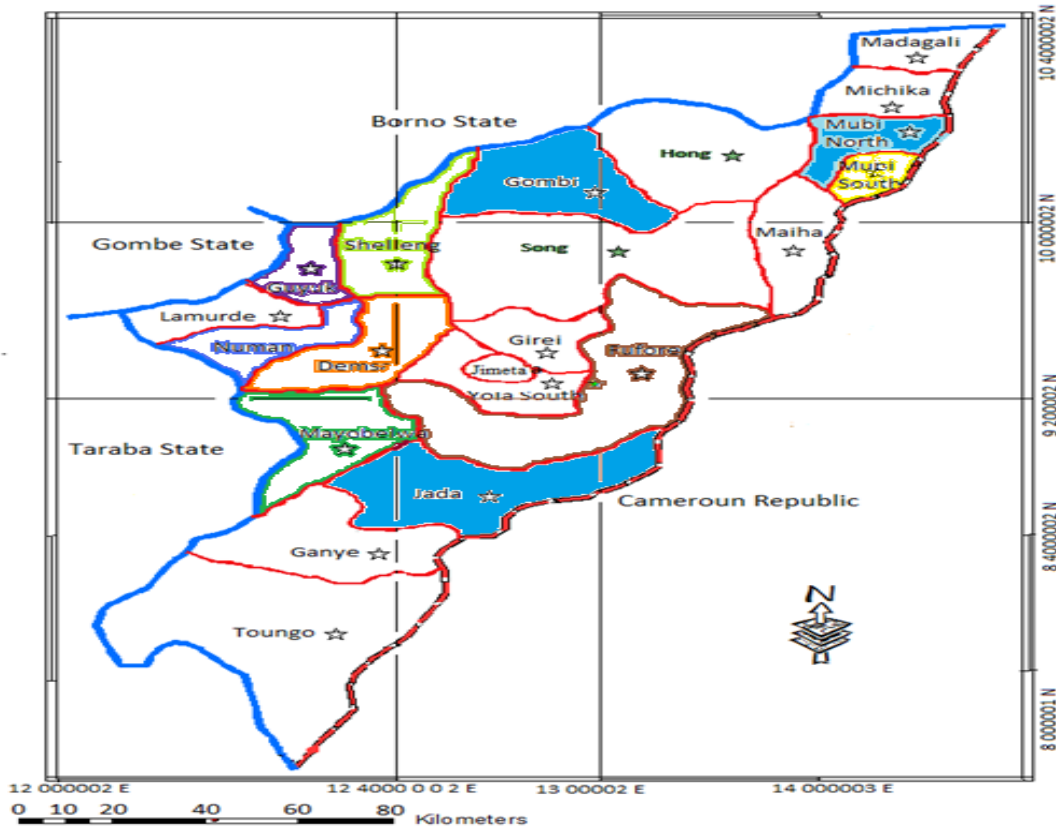


Figure 1b: Map of Adamawa State Showing the Study Area in Blue Color

Data Collection

The instruments used for this study were questionnaires and oral interviews. Well-structured questionnaires were developed in English language and distributed and where a widow does not understand English, oral interview using Hausa as a commonly spoken language was used.

Data Analysis

Data generated from the questionnaire were subjected to descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution table and bar charts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results show that, widows within the age bracket of 20-30 (46.3%) were the majority in the study area. This implies that, majority of widows in Adamawa State are still young and sexually active in their reproductive life. The results of the tribal distribution show that Margi widows were the majority with 22.7%. This could be probably as a result of the incessant

insurgency attacks in that area where a lot of men were killed. The findings on religious affiliation show that, Christian widows are the majority with 49.3%. The results show that, 31% had tertiary education, with 40% business women, 27% civil servants, 30.7% farmers and 1.3% pensioners, as can be seen in Table 1 and Figure 1, respectively.

It was also gathered that, 36.0% of widows had their marriage lives full of joy and happiness with high future expectations before the death of their husbands as shown in Fig 2. The results indicate that, 50.7% of the widows had moderately enjoyed their marriages before the demise of their husbands while 13.3% had their own marriages tough and bitter.

The results show that, 97.7% of the widows enjoyed their in-laws before the death of their husbands. This indicates that, their relationships with in-laws before the death of their husbands were very cordial and lovely, while only 1.3 % had rough relationships with their in-laws, as shown in Fig 3. This shows

that, some widows were treated badly by their in-laws after the death of the husbands. The findings also show that, unlike other countries of the world, widows were denied inheriting the property of their late husbands in Adamawa State, Nigeria, which cut across most African countries.

It was observed that, widows are thrown out immediately after the burial of their late husbands and properties left behind were shared among parents of the deceased leaving the children and the wives to live in penury and hardship. It is a common practice in Nigeria that, after the death of a husband, the eye-service cordial relationships between the widows and in-laws cease immediately, giving room for bitterness and rancor. Only few (8.7%) widows continue to enjoy cordial relationships with their in-laws after the death of their husbands, as shown in Figure 4. This group of widows who continue to live in peace and harmony with in-laws may have high sense of tolerance and patience to absorb all odds.

The results also show that, 56.0% of the widows suffer greatly in processing the benefits of their deceased husbands while 28.0% experience change of next-of-kin by their in-laws making life difficult for them and their children, as can be seen in Figure 5. The results show that, 16.2% of the widows felt widowhood rites needed to be observed irrespective of the odds and challenges while, 55.7% of the widows do not honour and follow such rites, as shown in Figure 6. The findings show that, 74.0% of widows had access to seminars and workshops on widowhood, educating them on how to live their lives as widows in countries where women are not respected and honoured while, 26.0% had no access to such seminars and workshops, as shown in Fig 7. The findings also show different levels of maltreatment experienced by widows across the state where 1.4% of the widows had extremely bad maltreatment, as shown in Figure 8.

Widows in Adamawa State suffer various kinds and degrees of pains and challenges because of their differences in ethnic groups, culture, and educational levels. The findings of this study buttresses earlier reports by Abolarin (1997) that, cultural influence is a major determinant of widows' pains and challenges. It has been established that, socio-cultural factors do influence widows' opportunities and challenges, especially in a multi-cultural society like Nigeria. Thus, the findings of this study agree with the observation made by Gbenda (1997), who reported that, widow's personality factors (like her marital and parental ethnic background) have influence on her level of deprivation in widowhood. Similarly, the findings of the study, especially on pains and challenges, confirm the findings of Wiebe (1987), McGloshen and O'Byrant (1988), who reported that, pains and challenges affect widows' personality trait, socio-economic status and socio-cultural opportunities.

In addition, pains and challenges of widowhood would be reduced if importance of business and career women are encouraged. Women should always engage themselves doing business if not working, in case of eventualities. The present findings made it vividly clear that, only those widows who were neither working nor doing business suffer more pains and challenges, especially financial challenges, while those that already have business or are working suffered more from emotional stress. A woman should work hard to earn money, to have her property and those properties should always be documented (receipts) in her name. In the words of Kroll (1987), "Even if a husband provided for his wife, in the event of his death, widows cannot always be sure that they will have access to that provision"

The importance of education in alleviating a widow's pains and challenges is also paramount. This is especially noticeable from the percentage score of widows who are illiterate, with primary school leaving certificates or secondary school education that suffer more

pains and challenges of widowhood as compared to those with tertiary education. Education, according to Oniye (2000), is like an in-built mechanism, the possession of which appropriately equips its possessor for life challenges. To support this, Choi (1992) opined that, widow's pains and challenges is alleviated in the area of high socio-economic status, personal resources like widow's level of education, work history and social security.

CONCLUSION

Widowhood imminent from the death of a spouse may be due to natural causes or human-propelled factors. Natural causes of death include old age and various forms of illnesses. Human propelled causes of death include accidents, war or violent conflicts and outright assassination or suicide or even murder which have been the major sources of widowhood since the last half of the 19th century. The 20th century has seen more wide spread civil conflicts of ethnic and religious inducement. In all of these, has emerged the growing number of widows who form a special category of women with socio-economic, psychological and health related problems as a result of their changed social status but which have never found a place in social policy in Nigeria. The lack of educational training by most widows makes this approach imperative. This measure is instructive to stem the prevailing abuse of widows who are being used in Nigeria by politicians as a source of charitable acts during campaigns and festivities. It is common knowledge during festivities to witness wives of state governors and other public officers assembling widows to receive food items and cash donations as a way of support and to display their so-called magnanimity. This represents exploitation of widows as a group for political gains. They are coerced by this means into voting for a particular party or candidate. There is a gendered context of widowhood that needs an effective approach that will introduce a new

form of socialization of women and men towards equal opportunities. The new socialization will, also, expose the prevailing discrimination that is sanctioned by cultures of various groups in Nigeria. Marriage should be seen as an institution in which both men and women have equal status. The post-death stage should provide opportunities for the remaining female partner to engage in life without pre-conditions that dehumanizes and impoverishes the widow. It is clear that widowhood as a social issue affects women more than men. Given traditional socialization that entrench dependence of women, widows over a fairly long period of time are affected psychologically, sexually, economically and socially. In a very profound way, cultural and social norms such as a rare chance to re-marry, mourning rites that places heavy restraints on movement and social contacts and lack of inheritance do exacerbate widowhood and deepen poverty among women rendering them to further abuse, discrimination and exploitation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are suggested: One; effective but non-radical way of challenging the effect of deleterious cultural practices that dehumanizes widows is broad based education. Women's education is necessary to empower them with knowledge about the dangerous implications of practices meted out to them by the society to which they are obviously partners with the males. For instance, a widow deprived of deserved inheritance of economic resources on account of an old-fashioned and irrational custom or tradition, and is further restrained or restricted and "forced" to perform certain 'rites of purification' can indeed be said to suffer infringements on her fundamental human rights in a modern society. It may, also, result in loss of reasonable income by the family and a tendency for school-going children to drop out of school. Policy makers should ensure that

extant laws reflect radical modifications in such a way that unacceptable patterns of behaviour on widows should be done away with. Government must ensure that education for the women; especially the girl-child is pursued vigorously and made compulsory up to at least the senior secondary school level. Laws against dispossessing the widows of their inheritance should be enacted and effectively enforced throughout the country. The women should be conscious of their fundamental human rights

and at times seek to use available civil society institutions; especially, the non-governmental organizations to protect and defend their rights against all forms of infringements.

The emerging trend in Nigeria of electing or appointing educated traditional rulers from retired bureaucrats and the military is likely to weaken the application of the traditional rites of widowhood on the women. To be sure, this practice is clear violation of the very foundation of most of our human rights.

Table 1: Socio-economic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Age		
20-30	139	46.3%
31-40	91	30.3%
41-50	50	16.7%
51 years & above	20	6.7%
Total	300	100
Tribe		
Margi	68	22.7%
Kilba	50	16.7%
Ga'anda	64	21.3%
Bura	58	19.3%
Chamba	30	10.0%
Lala	30	10.0%
Total	300	100
Religion		
Christianity	148	49.3%
Islamic	98	32.7%
Traditional	54	18.0%
Total	300	100
Education		
Illiterate	88	29.3%
Primary	57	19.0%
Secondary	62	20.7%
Tertiary	93	31.0%
Total	300	100
Level of Experience		
Less than 5 Years	190	63.3%
5-10 years	95	31.7%
11-15 years	5	1.7%
16-20 years	10	3.3%
Total	300	100
Occupation		
Civil servant	92	30.7%
Business	112	37.3%
Pensioner	4	1.3%
Farmer	92	30.7%
Total	N=300	N=100

q6 what is your occupation?

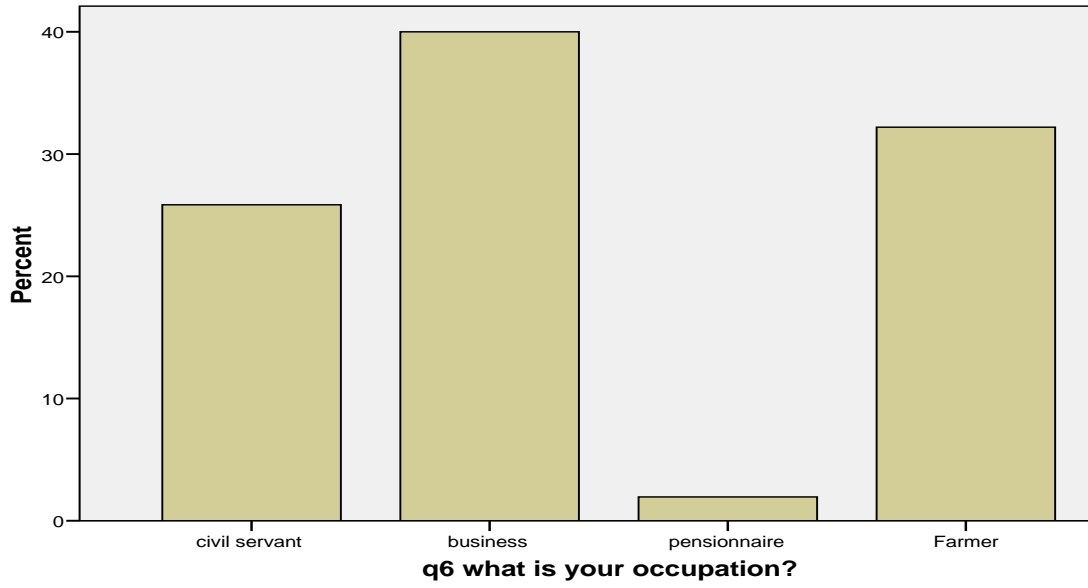


Fig 1: Occupation of the Widows

q13 What was the marriage life like?

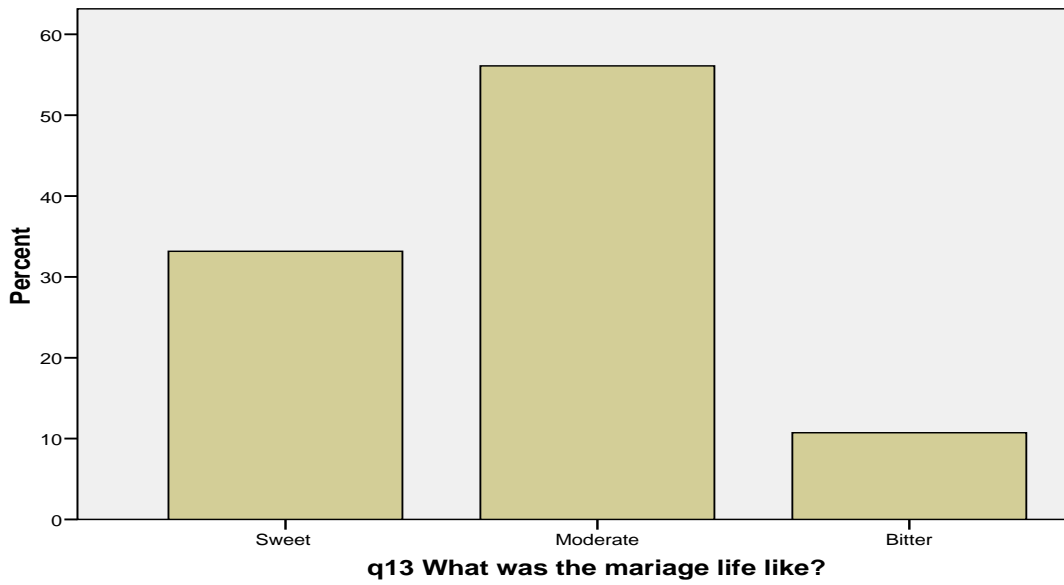


Fig 2: The Marriage Life of the Widows

q14 How was your relationship with your in-laws before the death of your husband?

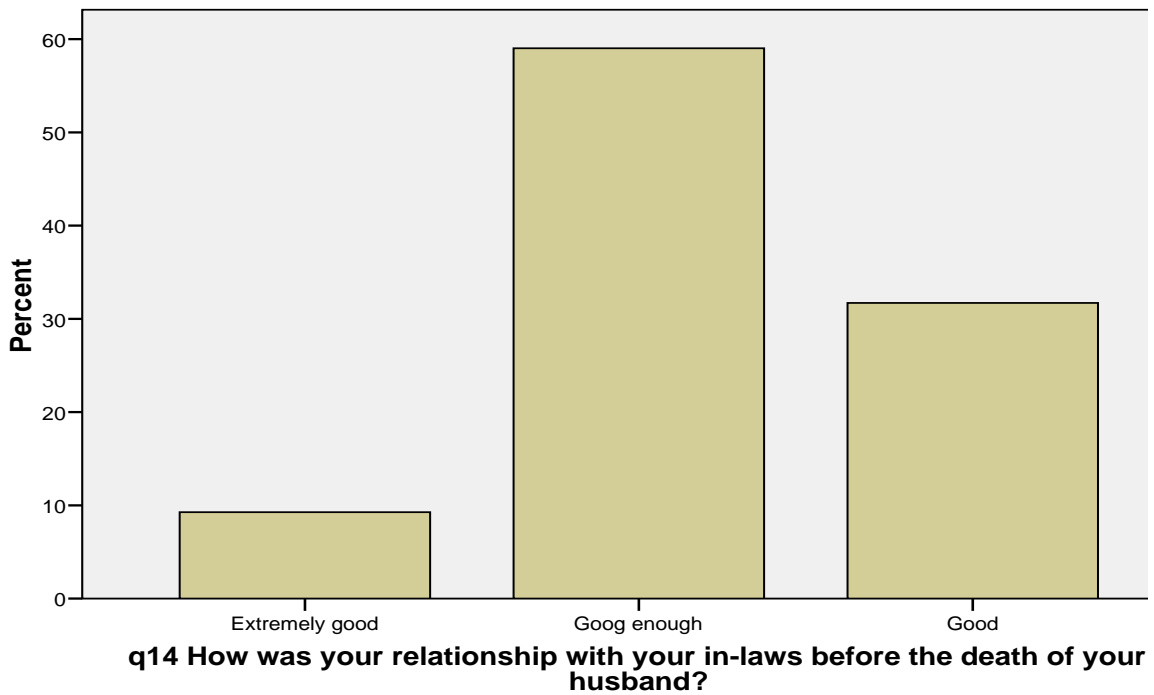


Fig 3 shows the relationship of widows with in-laws before the death of the husband

q15 How is your relationship with your in-laws after the death of your husband?

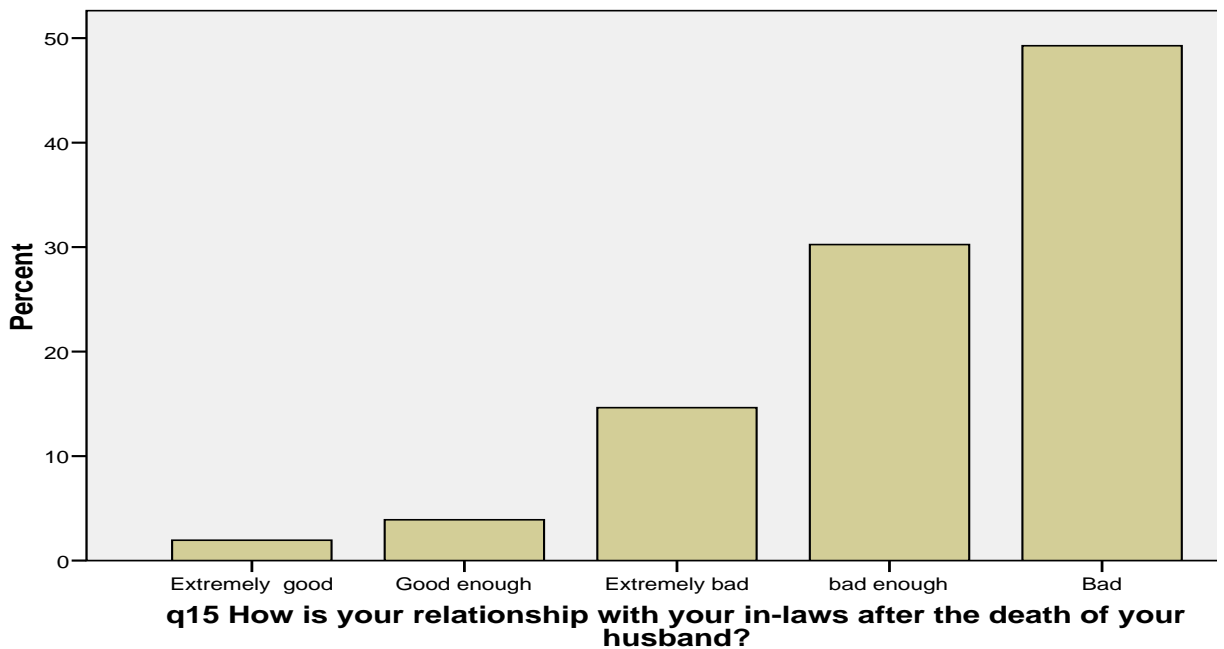


Fig 4: The Relationship of the Widows with Their in-laws After the Death of Their Husband

q29 If yes, what kind of challenge?

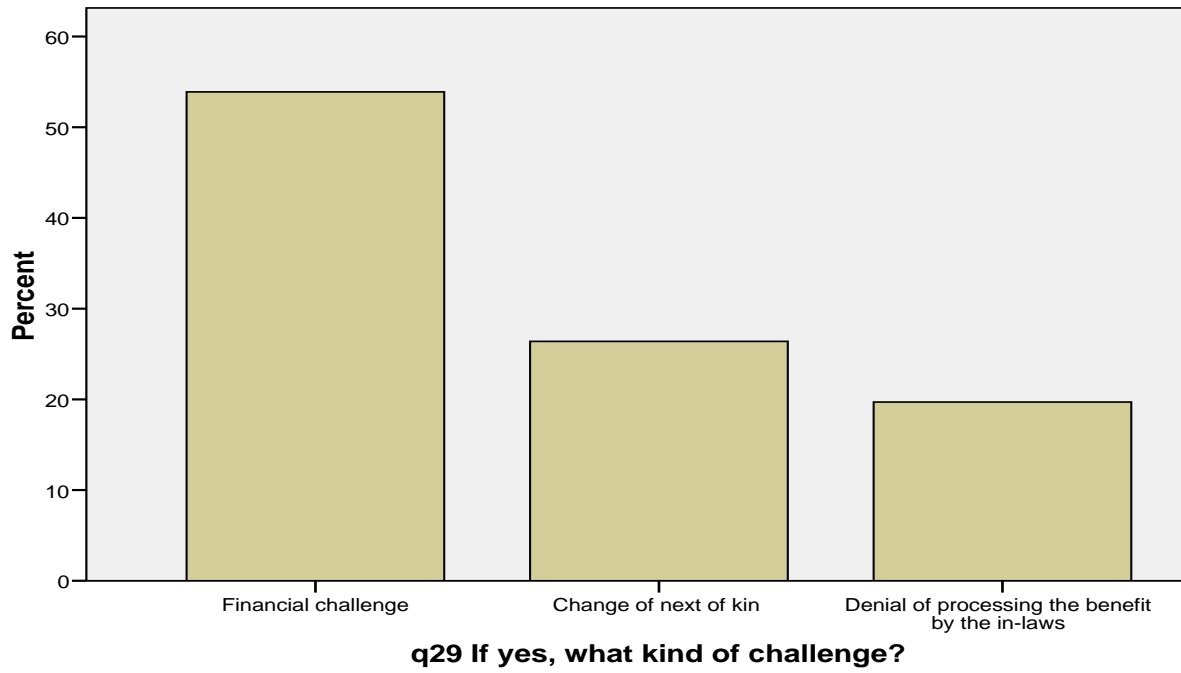


Fig 5: The Challenges Faced by Widows in Processing the Benefit of Their Husbands

q43 How did you deal with the situation

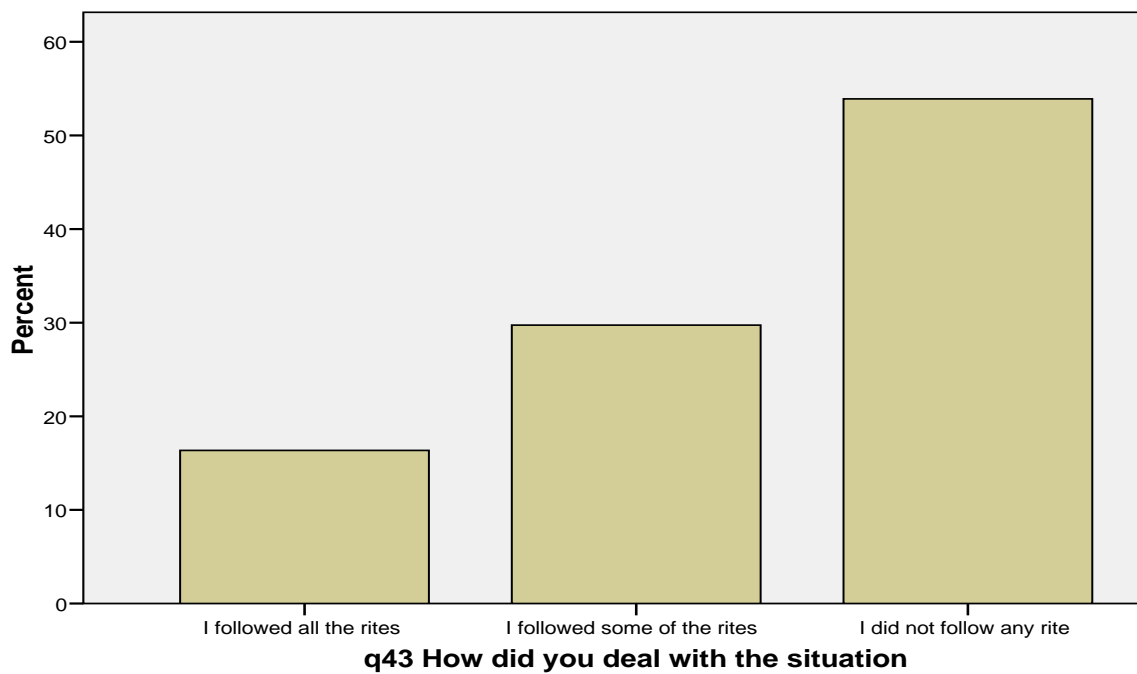


Fig 6: Widowhood Rites

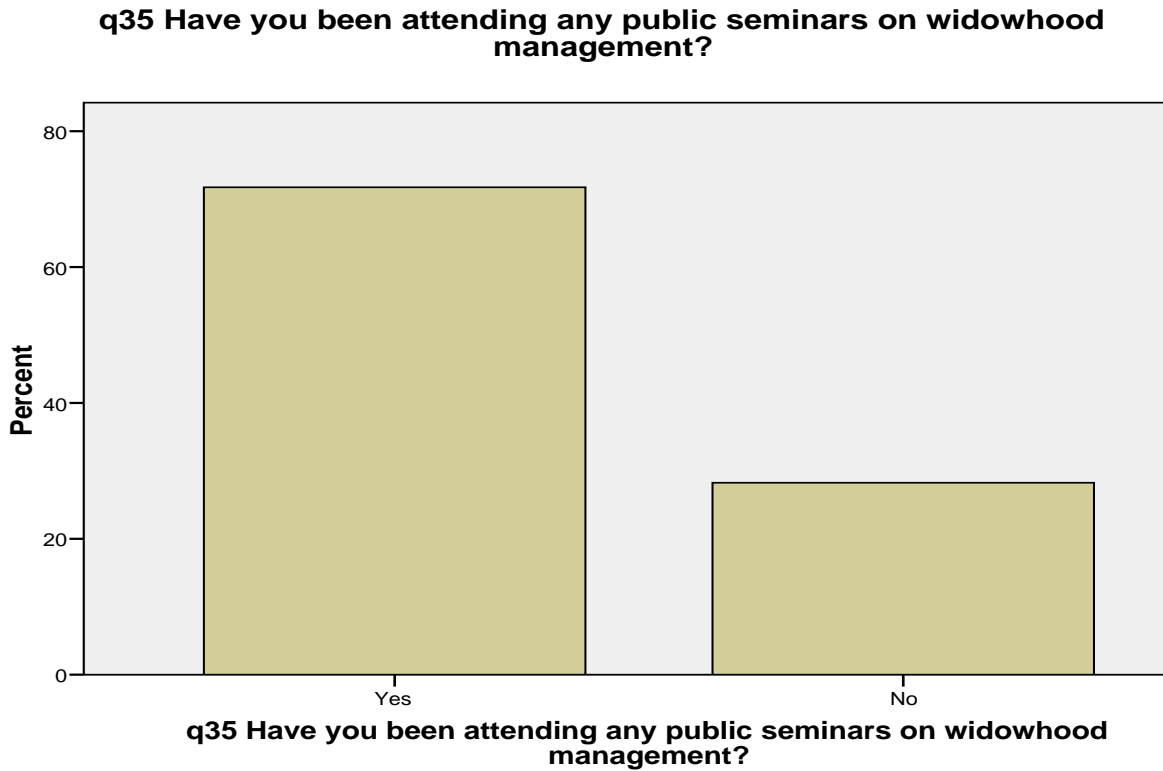


Fig 7: Widows that Attended Seminar

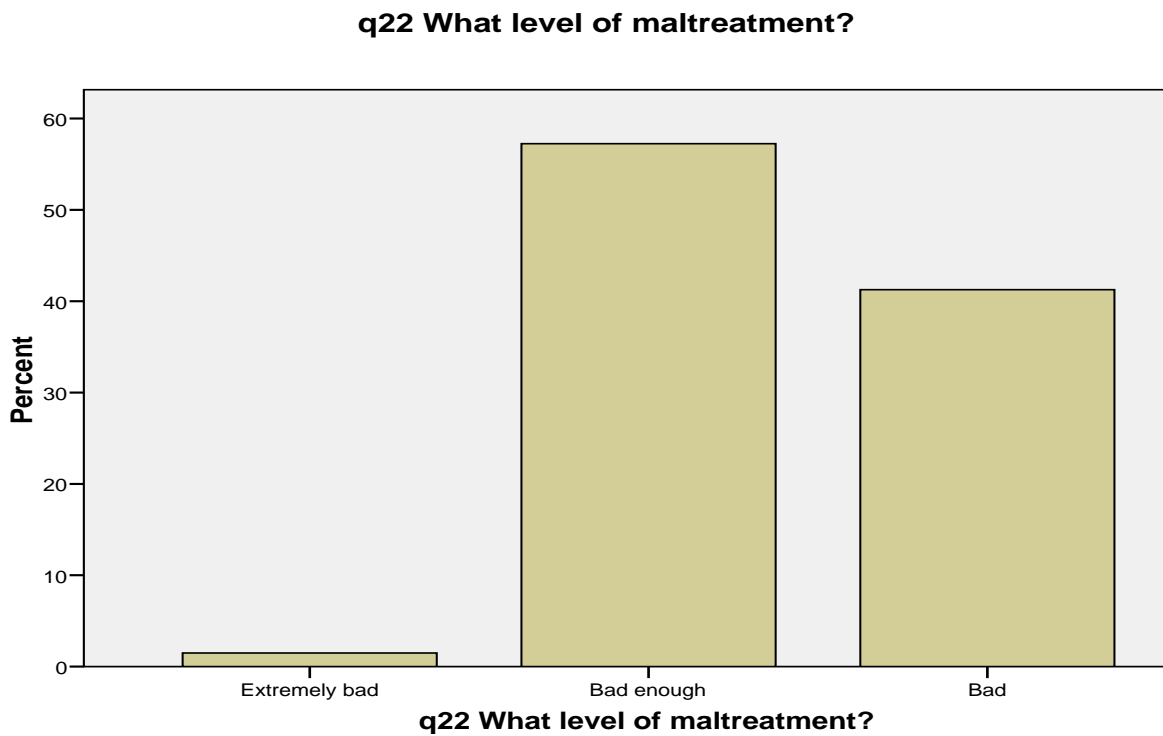


Fig 8: Different Level of Maltreatment Experienced by Widows

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