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Evaluation of the Correctional Role of Interpersonal Communication on Gender Victimisation and Harmful Widowhood Practices in South-East Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study evaluation of the correctional role of interpersonal communication on gender victimisation and harmful widowhood practices in southeast Nigeria sought to examine how interpersonal communication can positively change the narrative on the challenge of gender victimisation and harmful widowhood practices. The specific objectives of the study were to ascertain the level of knowledge of the respondents the level of awareness about gender victimisation and harmful widowhood practices in the Southeast, The study was anchored on the Group Communication Theory. The survey research method was adopted to investigate the correctional role of interpersonal communication while the questionnaire served as a data collection instrument. The survey research design is appropriate because it helps in accessing the audience level of knowledge and perception about widowhood practices. A sample of 384 was selected from the 15,786,213 projected populations of selected South-Eastern States namely; Anambra, Enugu and Imo State using Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table. The data collected were analysed using Quantitative data collection and analysis which includes frequency and percentage with tables. Findings from the research show that majority of the respondents in the three States under study are aware of the phenomenon of gender victimization and harmful widowhood practices, that more than 70% of respondents in the area of study are not aware of the laws on gender victimization and widowhood practices due to cultural differences, there were variation in opinion in the three different States under study regarding whether statutory laws can or cannot stop gender victimization and harmful widowhood practices. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended, among others, that women advocacy group and other agencies should engage various media of communication especially the social networking services in disseminating worrying stories of harmful widowhood practices and gender victimization.

Keywords: Discrimination, Experiences of Widows, Gender Victimisation, Harmful Widowhood, Interpersonal Communication

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Gender discrimination is almost universal. In the greater parts of the world the patriarchal system that sustains domination by the alpha male and his kind is the rule. Though societies exist where women lead the brood, these prove the exceptions rather than the rule. In the greater number of cases, especially in the past, the woman is treated unfairly, unequally and poorly, misjudged and disadvantaged, denied

opportunities and harassed based on the fact of her female and a woman. Discrimination was (is) the companion of the female folk. This discrimination is often justified on the basis of perceptions and myths, cultures and role differentiation between the female and the male. But why this discrimination? Is it logical or biological? Any justification for gender discrimination or victimisation?

The fact of being male or female – meaning sex, is entirely different from being a man or a woman – meaning gender. Whereas sex is simply biological, gender is assigned, cultured-based and forever in a state of flux. Today, there is sex category confusion; dominant societies, particularly in Europe and North America, are manufacturing assorted sex class even as individuals are now free to pick and choose what sex category and sexual orientation to belong; bisexual, transgendered, androgynous, gay, pansexual, asexual, lesbian, queer, non-binary or gender fluid. Yep (2009) in Okoro, Ajaero & Nwachukwu (2015) states that 'although often conflated, sex and gender are separate and distinct concepts. Sex refers to physiological and biological differences between men and women (e.g. male and female) gender refers to one's social and psychological sex role orientation (e.g. masculine, feminine and androgynous)'. Harari (2015) says 'to make things less confusing, scholars usually distinguish between 'sex', which is a biological category, and 'gender', a cultural category. Sex is divided between males and females, and the qualities of this division are objective and have remained constant throughout history. Gender is divided between men and women (and some cultures recognise other categories). So-called 'masculine' and 'feminine' qualities are inter-subjective and undergo constant changes. For example, there are far-reaching differences in the behaviour, desires, dress and even body posture expected from women in classical Athens and women in modern Athens'.

Thus, gender discrimination and victimisation spring from gender social constructs. They vary over generations in relation to social and evolutionary dynamics and are therefore amenable to psycho-social changes within particular societies. Gender discrimination obtains in situations where individuals are treated differently because of the way they are seen – especially being man or woman. It touches on what happens in such areas as human rights, social roles, cultural and religious equity, equality before the law, human dignity, equality of persons, equal access to education, opportunities and resources where women are disadvantaged, disqualified or excluded. Concern Worldwide (2023) defines gender discrimination as 'the unequal or disadvantageous treatment of a person based on their gender. Women and girls are most likely to experience the negative impacts of gender discrimination. It can mean restricted access to education, a lower standing in society, less freedom to make decisions around their personal and family life, and lower wages for the jobs and work they do. Women and girls also experience rampant levels of violence and harassment.

Who is a widow? What is widowhood? What are widowhood rites and why are they considered harmful, victimising and discriminatory against the 'weaker gender'? Widows are women whose legal husbands are dead. They are called '*nwayiajadu*' in Igboland. Widows lose their husbands through death and remain unmarried. At this time and during the periods leading to the burial of the husbands, the bereaved mourn their loss and in many ways. A widow is any female person married under native law and custom or under the marriage act or any other law recognized in Nigeria whose husband has died and has not remarried (The Prohibition of Infringement of a Widows/Widower's Fundamental Rights Law 2001 Section 2).

Widowhood is the state or period of being a widow or widower (Hornby, 2020). When one's marriage partner dies, the surviving partnerstays in a state of widowhood or widower-hood if either decides not to marry. But if the man or woman decides to remarry, they cease to be in widowhood. Edekobi (2000) in Mathias (2015) defined widowhood as the condition that follows the death of one of the partners in a marriage. Widowhood is a disruption of marital status and subsequent emotional and social dislocation due to a spouse's death. The World Widows Report (2016) lists the primary causes of widowhood as: poverty, work, disease and poor health, suicide, road accidents and conflict. It states that 'High levels of poverty, preventable disease and conflict are the prime causes of premature male death in developing countries – (Lee, 2004:1) and Chant (1997:92) make this point as well – creating the greatest number of widows least able to cope with the material consequences of widowhood. The high incidence of premature male death in developing countries is therefore a major personal economic and social status

concern for women of all ages, especially for younger women and married girls. For developed countries, where most widows are retirement age or elderly, the main cause of widowhood is the differing life expectancy between men and women. Large numbers of elderly widows in developed countries are a significant concern since many have depended financially on their husbands and lack sufficient provision for the loss. The most significant issues for this group are health and the costs associated with health and care provision.

Poverty, which it sees as a range of deprivations, not simply lack of income as there is more to determining well-being than money, acts as a primary cause of widowhood in three ways:

- Through hazardous work (often the only option for poor males).
- Personal behaviour or psycho-social tendencies causing early death.
- Poor health and disease caused by inability to afford required nutrition and medical care in countries without effective free healthcare, lack of adequate housing, and lack of clean water and sewage systems.

The World Widows Report (2016) further identified twelve key issues affecting or arising from the plight of widows in differing degrees in diverse societies of the world. These issues include; property theft and denial of inheritance, superstition and/or cruel beliefs, discrimination against women, denial of right to family, child labour, remarriage, widowhood customs, child marriage, poverty and neglect, little or no social welfare protection, disease and public health, girl-child deprivation.

In the South-East of Nigeria, the passage of a husband is the beginning of a series of events that often leaves the widow and her children in a state of heightened emotional torture and exposure to degrees of psychological trauma and levels of economic deprivation. Women experience and suffer marital frustrations and depression even at the death of the husband where a woman will have to face series of dehumanizing treatments from the in-laws and the community with the accusation that she had a hand in the death of her husband. Besides being usually disadvantaged in the distribution of the late husband's property, the widow is also subjected to some harrowing harmful widowhood practices. These practices include;

Generally, most of these harmful widowhood practices examined in this paper include: Shaving of hairs, Wearing of black/white clothes, Sleeping on the floor or mat, Refrain from taking bath for a period of time, Being made to swear with husband's corpse, Drinking the water from the bathing of the husband's corpse, Seclusion, Eating from old earthen wares, Accepting levirate marriage, Disinheritance – land, husband's possessions etc. Widowhood rites are ceremonies performed for either a woman or man following the death of her husband or wife according to the customs or traditions of the community. These rites upon death are meant, it is believed, to enable the proper transition of the deceased's spirit, protect and cleanse the widow and the household of perceived defilement and deter bad spirit held to wont to haunt the living. Some widowhood rites performed by a widow as a part of the burial preparation of her late husband are traditional tasks she goes through to prove her innocence in the death of her husband. The duration and tasks involved in these rites vary among communities. Why is widowhood rites performed? Widowhood rite is a purification ceremony where a widow is put through stages of rituals for the following reasons: To prove her innocence in the death of her husband, to mourn her husband according to traditional demands. to appease her husband's soul to go to the spirit world in peace, to appease the spirit of the dead to favour the family and the community he left and to maintain the cultural beliefs and practice of the people.

The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) in its May 11, 2023 report that 'women in Awka, Anambra State, on Thursday, staged a peaceful protest against "barbaric widowhood practices" in the State. They demanded the stoppage of the ritual where widows were forced to drink from the water with which their late husband's corpse was bathed preparatory to a burial. The protesters were led by Hope Okoye, chairperson of the Agency on Violence against Persons Prohibition Act in Anambra. The women gathered at the Children, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Court in Awka to protest against the alleged maltreatment of a woman by her late husband's family. A brother-in-law of the plaintiff had reportedly forced the widow to drink from the water with which her husband's corpse was bathed before burial. Again in a report titled '*Anambra Monarchs Demand End To Widowhood, Forced Marriage, Rituals, Other Harmful*

Native Practices' of August 29, 2022, *Sahara Reporters,* wrote that Anambra State traditional rulers have, in a conference, unanimously condemned all forms of violence against women and girls in the State including "widowhood practices; denial of inheritance, forced and girl child marriage, harmful rituals and others". There seems to be an absence of diachronic studies aimed at showing how widowhood practices and rituals have evolved or changed over time especially in the last decade in the Southeast. No culture is static. They are influenced by several other cultural and social imports from those they interact with. For instance, the Pentecostal religion, exposure to other civilised practices, wealth and education influence cultures. These contribute to change, over time, what people do as custom. For instance, initiation into the masquerade cult in Igboland is not now what it used to be. What would ordinarily be termed '*alu',* an abomination, a taboo in the past is now the order of the day; maidens dancing with masquerades, masquerades preaching the Christian sermon with megaphones on the streets, masquerades drinking beer in restaurants and begging total strangers. These are changes – for better or worse. The question is; what has been happening in the area of widowhood practices and rituals? Why are they happening and what needs to change? Against this backdrop the study broad objective is to evaluate the correctional role of interpersonal communication on gender discrimination and harmful widowhood practices in Southeast Nigeria. While specific objectives are: To ascertain the level of knowledge and the level of awareness of the respondents about gender victimisation and harmful widowhood practices in the South-East, Nigeria. In line with the stated objectives, the following research questions will guide the study: What is the level of knowledge and the level of awareness of the respondents about gender victimisation and harmful widowhood practices in the South-East in Nigeria?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The theory employed for this study is Functional Group Communication Theory

Functional Group Communication Theory

Functional group communication theory was initially introduced by John Dewey to supersede the existing psychology theory which he deemed not able to reduce the utilisation of philosophical conceptual process (Lewis, 1930, cited in Locke, 2015). Other scholars that contributed to functional theory were Robert Bales and his work on interaction process analysis and Irving Janis and his work on vigilant decision making. During the early part of the 20th century, John Dewey developed a method to describe the process that individuals should go through as they work on problem solving. In his 1910book, "*How We Think*," Dewey suggested that the *process of reflective thinking* involves five steps: which are; A felt difficulty, its location and definition, suggestion of possible solution, development by reasoning of the implications and consequences of the solution and further observation and experiment leading to its acceptance or rejection (Salazar, 2012).

The second influence on the development of the functional theory of effective group decision making is the work of Robert Bales. Bales and his colleagues had been working on group members' ability to deal with four functional problems: adaptation, instrumental control, expression and integration. These are problems with which groups must deal in order to perform effectively. Adaptation and instrumental control relate to the management of task concerns (making a decision); expression and integration relate to the management of socio-emotional concerns (managing relationships). Groups strive to maintain equilibrium with regard to these two concerns and group communication is a major means of maintaining that equilibrium. For Bales, work on the task serves to disturb a group's balance in the socio-emotional dimension and group members must work to restore this balance. Group communication, then, is both a means by which deviations from equilibrium can be identified and a means by which equilibrium can be accomplished or restored (Salazar, 2012).

The third influence on the development of the functional theory of effective decision making is the work of Irving Janis on vigilant decision making. Janis theorised that highly cohesive groups sometimes suffer from poor decision making because of the pressures placed on their members to reach consensus. Janis labelled this condition *groupthink*. In all three influences, the functional nature of communication is the focus; in other words, communication is goal oriented and serves to accomplish some purpose (Salazar,

2012).

In Dewey's reflective thinking method, communication is functional because when applied to group discussion, it is the means through which each of the steps of the method are accomplished, thus enabling the group to reach effective resolution of a problem. Bales' IPA denotes communication categories that function to enable a group to deal with equilibrium in task and socio-emotional domains. In Janis's vigilant decision making, communication is functional because it is the means through which group members fulfil each of the characteristics of vigilance (Salazar, 2012, in Asemah *et al*, 2017).

Functional Group Communication Theory helps us understanding why groups of intelligent, well-educated and civilised people coming from different communities in the South-East make or sustain decision that are clear atrocious and are plain infringement on the rights of women, widows and children. In the contemporary Southeast Nigeria, harmful widowhood practices still persist. As Okpala & Utoh-Ezeajugh (2015) 'even the most highly educated individuals become defensive when they feel their culture and personal identity are being attacked. The fear of losing the psychological, moral and material benefits of "belonging" is one of the greatest motivators of conformity.

The Review

Gender Victimisation and Discrimination

According to Egbujor (2015) gender refers to social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization. In this regard, gender defines power relations in society and determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. Their promoting gender equality is an important part of the development strategy that seeks to enable people, both women and men, to diminish their poverty and improve the standard of living. Thus, gender deals with how men relate with women, how girls relate with boys, what is expected by the society from the women and girls, what they can do and not do, what is acceptable and not acceptable within particular contexts in a tribe, a band, a community or nation bound by specific cultures and norms.

Furthermore, Okoro, Ajaero and Nwachukwu (2015) note that gender has been changing over time. Initially, gender was defined to be a person's sex, that is, 'the condition of being male or female'. In the 1970s, the term gender as used interchangeably with sex sprang up debates among the academic feminists who argued that one's physical body is not a determinant of a person's behaviour. They believed that one's sex, that is being male or female, is quite different from one's socially-constructed role, which they termed gender. According to Pilcher and Whelehan (2004), for instance, The concept of gender, as we now use it came into common parlance during the early 1970s. It was used as an analytical category to draw a line of demarcation between biological sex differences and the way these are used to inform behaviours and competencies, which are then assigned as either 'masculine' or 'feminine'. The purpose of affirming a sex/gender distinction was to argue that the actual physical or mental effects of biological difference had been exaggerated to maintain a patriarchal system of power and to create a consciousness among women that they were naturally better suited to 'domestic' roles (p. 56).

The Experiences of Widows in the South-East of Nigeria

In a definitive and widely referenced work Norway (1996) by Chima titled *Widowhood among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria,* widowhood practices and rituals in South-East Nigeria were broadly captured. Korieh (1996) gives an account of an aspect of these practices in section on Ritual Seclusion -*Ino na nso*: Before the burial, and immediately after the burial, up to seven to fourteen weeks while funeral visits still take place, the widow is supposed to be secluded in a most restricted manner. Tony Ubesie described this as *ino na nso*. What he described as taking place in the Awka area of Anambra State agrees with what G. T. Basden described in the early part of this century there. It also agrees with what Onah described in the Nsukka area, Talbot among the Kalabari in the Delta area and what current research in Mbaise shows. While some of these practices show genuine reaction to the loss of the husband, others help to clear the widow of any suspicion of killing her husband. Ritual seclusion and general isolation of the widow for a certain period from the community or village is a wide spread practice in Africa.

Empirical Review

In a study conducted in 2021 by Misheck Dube examined widowhood and associated risks in under-resourced communities: the risks associated with wildwood were investigated. The work looked at the risks associated with widowhood in under resourced communities of Binga District in Zimbabwe. It used a qualitative research approach and a phenomenological research design. Purposive sampling was employed to engage ten widows in one-on-one in-depth interviews while data were analysed thematically and backed up by existing literature to provide thick descriptions. The findings of the study indicated that widows were exposed to an arsenal of health, psychological, social and economic risks. Many of the risks associated with widowhood are exacerbated by lack of supportive environments and provision of conducive environment to trigger proper adaptation mechanism especially among the young widows in under-resourced communities.

Ojiakor, Etodike, Onyebuchi and Obayi, (2018) explored burial rites in Igboland. The work titled *Burial rites in Igboland: psycho-communication channels of gender discrimination* examined the burial rites in Igboland as psycho-communicating channels of gender discrimination between man and a woman with a view to ascertaining the psycho-social cum theoretical underpinning of differences in the widowhood and widower-hood practices and its personal, religious and cultural implications on the bereaved using the Igbos of South-Eastern Nigeria as case study. The study found there is evidence that a wide range of discrepancies abound in the burial rites with male gender at an advantage.

Aruma (2018) focused on the roles of communication in community development. The paper highlighted the roles of communication in community development to include conscientization of members of participating communities, provision of relevant information, provision of opportunities for dialogue and discussion and provision of opportunities for sharing of information and ideas that will facilitate effective service delivery in community development.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The survey research design is considered appropriate for this study because it helps in assessing the audience level of knowledge and perception about widowhood practices. Survey is also considered appropriate, whenever the source of primary data for a study would be the views of members of the public or any particular group (Ohaja, 2003; Owuamalam, 2012). The study covered South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Population of the study comprises 15,786,213 residents of Anambra, Enugu and Imo States of Nigeria. The population of Anambra was 5,817,207; Enugu has 4,495,561 while Imo has 5,473,445 making it a total of 15,786,213. A sample of 384 was selected from the 15,786,213 projected populations of select South-Eastern States using Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table. The table provides that when a given population is from 100,000 and above, the corresponding sample size should be 384. The details were as follows:

Anambra State = 142
Enugu State = 109
Imo State = 133

Total = 384

The sampling frame for this study comprises all the local government areas in the nine Senatorial zones in Anambra, Enugu and Imo states where tradition and customary norms still allow HWP.

Table 1: Study Area: State, Senatorial District and LGAs

States	Senatorial Districts	Local Government Areas
Anambra State	Anambra Central	Anaocha, Awka South, Awka North, Dunukofia, Idemili North, Idemili South, and Njikoka LG As
	Anambra North	Anambra East, Anambra West, Ayamelum, Onitsha North, Onitsha South, Ogbaru and Oyi LGAs
	Anambra South	Aguata, Ekwusigo, Ihiala, Nnewi North, Nnewi South, Orumba North and Orumba South LGAs
Enugu State	Enugu East	Enugu East, Enugu North, Enugu South, Nkanu East, Nkanu West, Isiuzo LGAs
	Enugu North	Igbo Etiti, Igboeze North, Igboeze South, Uzo-Uwani, Nsukka, Udenu LGAs
	Enugu West	Aninri, Awgu, Ezeagu, Oji River, Udi LGAs
Imo State	Orlu	Orlu, Nkwerre, Oru East, Oru West, Ohaji Egbema, Ideato North, Ideato South, Orsu, Njaba, Isu, Oguta, Nwangele LGAs
	Owerri	Owerri West, Owerri North, Owerri Municipal, Mbaitolu, Ikeduru, Ezinihitte, Ahiazu Mbaise, Ngor Okpalla LGAs
	Okigwe	Isiala Mbano, Ihitte Mbano, IhitteUboma, Obowo, Okigwe South, Okigwe North, Ehime Mbano LGAs

Source: Researcher Computation (2025)

The purposive and the multistage sampling techniques was used to select the samples. Using random selection method, Dunukofia LGA in Anambra Central senatorial zone, Anambra East in Anambra North senatorial zone and Nnewi North in Anambra South senatorial zone were selected from Anambra State. Imo state Oguta LGA in Orlu, Owerri Municipal LGA in Owerri senatorial zone, Ehime-Mbano LGA in Okigwe senatorial zone while In Enugu State, Nkanu East in Enugu East senatorial zone, Nsukka in Enugu North senatorial zone and Udi in Enugu West senatorial zone. The study also used the simple random sampling without replacement to select one town/community from the selected LGAs

Table 3.1: Areas and Sample Distribution

States (Sample)	Senatorial Zones	Local Govt. Areas	Towns/Communities	No of respondents
Anambra (141)	Anambra Central	Dunukofia	Ifitedunu	26
			Enugwu Ukwu	33
	Anambra North	Anambra East	Nsugbe	24
			Igbariam	19
	Anambra South	Nnewi North	Amichi	16
			Nnewi	23
				Total 141
Enugu (117)	Enugu East	Nkanu East	Nkerefi	15
			Amagunze	17
	Enugu North	Nsukka	Iheagu	27
			Umuoyo	20
	Enugu West	Udi	Appakwume-Nze	22
			Amokwe	16
				Total 117
Imo (126)	Owerri	Owerri Municipal	Amawom	23
			Umuoyima	20
	Okigwe	Ehime Mbano	Akanu/Umuezeala	18
			Nsu	21
	Orlu	Oguta	Nneukwu	18
			Izombe	26
				Total 126
Total				**384**

Source: Researcher's Computation (2025)

Data were collected through questionnaire. A draft copy of the questionnaire was given to scholars for proper review in line with objective of the study and research questions. A Cronbach Alpha coefficient was generated for the pilot study using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23. The reliability test was conducted using the Cronbach Alpha in estimating the internal consistency of the instrument. Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient normally ranges between 0 and 1. The reliability coefficient was 0.645 or 64.5%, which showed a high reliability of the instrument. Based on this, the instrument is adequately reliable.

4.0 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Data Analysis

The study used 384 determined as sample size as respondents for the quantitative data collection and analysis. It was observed that 12 copies or 3.1% of the copies were not valid since 9 were not returned and 3 were not completely filled. It means that 372 copies were therefore used for the study as valid copies, yielding 97% response rate and 3.1% mortality rate.

Table 1: Questionnaire Distribution and Return Rate

States	No. Distributed	No. Returned	Percentage
Anambra	142	138	97
Enugu	109	107	98
Imo	133	127	95
Total	**384**	**372**	**97**

Source: Researchers Computation (2025)

4.2 Demographic Data Analysis

Table 2: Respondents' Sex Variation

Variables (Sex)	Frequency	Percentage
Male	178	46
Female	206	54
Total	**384**	**100**

Source: Researchers Computation (2025)

From the data in Table 2, it is seen that 178 persons representing 46% were males, while 206 people representing 54% were females, as elicited via the questionnaire. It means that there were more females than males in the sample.

Table 3: Respondents' Marital Status

Variables (Marital Status)	Frequency	Percentage
Widow	**151**	**39**
Widower	**91**	**24**
Married	**83**	**22**
Single	22	5
Divorced	37	10
Total	**384**	**100**

Source: Researchers Computation (2025)

Data on the variable of marital status on table 3 shows that 151 persons representing 39% were widows, 91 persons representing 24% were widowers, 83 persons representing 22% were married, 22 persons representing 5% were single while 37 persons representing 10% were divorced.

Table 4: Respondents' Age Distribution

Variables (Marital Status)	Frequency	Percentage
18 – 30	18	5
31 – 40	39	10
41 – 50	71	18
51 – 60	104	27
60 and above	152	40
Total	**384**	**100**

Source: Researchers Computation (2025)

Data on the variable of age distribution on table 4 shows that 18 persons representing 5% were between the age range of 18 - 30 years, 39 (10%) respondents were from 31 - 40 years, 71 (18%) were from 41 - 50 years, 104 (27%) were age ranged 51 - 60 years while 152 (40%) were age range 60 years and above.

Table 5: Respondents' Educational Qualification

Variables (Educational Qualification)	Frequency	Percentage
First school leaving certificate	23	7
WASC/SSCE/NECO	89	23
National Diploma / National Certificate in Education	117	30
HND, BA or BSc	101	26
Master's and above	54	14
Total	**384**	**100**

Source: Researcher's Computation (2025)

Table 5 above indicates that the greater percentage of the respondents possessed higher educational levels than WASC. More than 50 percent had tertiary level of education while over 10 percent had a postgraduate qualification.

Table 6: Respondents' Length of years as Widow/Widower

Variables (Length of years as Widow/Widower)	Frequency	Percentage
6 months - 1 year	37	10
1 year 1 month - 3 years	36	9
3 years 1 month - 5 years	114	30
5 years 1 month - 10 years	121	31
10 years 1 month - 15 years	62	16
15 years 1 month and above	14	4
Total	**384**	**100**

Source: Researcher's Computation (2025)

As seen in table 6, most of the respondents were divorced for between three and ten years. In regards to the study this is a reliable demographic to provide relevant answers to the research questions based on actual experience. Those with over 15 years as widows or widowers also offer valuable insights on harmful widowhood practices.

Table 7: Respondents' Number of Children

Variables (Number of Children)	Frequency	Percentage
Nil	31	9
1	58	15
2	97	25
3	109	28
4	71	19
5 and above	18	4
Total	**384**	**100**

Source: Researcher's Computation (2025)

From table 7, it can be seen that fewer women are having above four children for a family. The greater majority fall within the range of two and three children which seems to tally with the approach to family size for those with higher levels of education and seen in data on the educational qualifications of the respondents.

Respondents to Research Questions

Research Questions One: *What is the level of knowledge of the respondents about gender victimisation and harmful widowhood practices in the South-East?*

Table 8: Respondents' Knowledge of Gender Victimisation and Harmful Widowhood Practices

State	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Anambra	I know	134	95
	I don't know	5	4
	Can't Say	2	1
	Total	**141**	**100**
Enugu	I know	111	94
	I don't know	3	3
	Can't Say	3	3
	Total	**117**	**100**
Imo	I know	120	96
	I don't know	1	1
	Can't Say	5	3
	Total	**126**	**100**
Total		**384**	**100**

Source: Researcher's Computation (2025)

Data from Table 8 reveal that overall majority of the respondents in the under study- Anambra, Enugu and Imo States accounting for over 90% indicated that they are aware of the phenomenon of gender victimisation and harmful widowhood practices in the Southeast. In Anambra State, 95% stated that they know about harmful widowhood practice and discriminations against women in various areas of life while only 5% ticked that they don't know. Data for Enugu and Imo followed the same pattern, majority having and less than 6% saying they don't know or can't say. The implication of data on Table 8 is that gender victimisation and harmful widowhood practices is quite widespread and pervasive in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria.

Table 9: Respondents' Awareness of Specific Gender Victimisation and Harmful Widowhood Practices

S/N	Variable	Anambra (141	%	Enugu (117)	%	Imo (126)	%
1.	Shaving of hairs	141	100	117	100	126	100
2	Wearing of black/white clothes	141	100	117	100	124	98
3	Sleeping on the floor or mat	133	94	99	85	119	94
4	Drinking the water from the bathing of the husband's corpse	125	89	58	50	74	59
5	Seclusion	140		101	86	126	100
6	Disinheritance – land, husband's possessions etc.	141	99	115	98	121	96
	Total	**141**	**100**	**117**	**100**	**126**	**100**

Source: Researcher's Computation (2025)

Having established the respondents' knowledge and awareness of gender victimisations and harmful widowhood practices, the study also sought to know whether people in the area of study are aware of specific harmful widowhood practices. These specific practices include but are not limited to shaving of hairs, wearing of black/white clothes, sleeping on the floor or mat, drinking the water from the bathing of the husband's corpse, seclusion, disinheritance – land, husband's possessions etc. Findings from analysis of data gathered show that 100% of respondents in Anambra, Enugu and Imo States indicated they are aware of shaving of hairs, wearing of black/white clothes and disinheritance – land, husband's possessions. However, different levels of awareness were indicated for sleeping on the floor or mat, drinking the water from the bathing of the husband's corpse and seclusion.

Research Questions Two: *What is the level of awareness of the respondents about international, national and state laws or legal position on gender victimisation and widowhood practices in South-East?*

Table 10: Respondents' Level of Awareness of International, National and State Laws or Legal Position on Gender Victimisation and Widowhood Practices

State	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Anambra	I know	44	31
	I don't know	73	52
	Can't Say	24	17
	Total	**141**	**100**
Enugu	I know	27	24
	I don't know	79	67
	Can't Say	11	9
	Total	**117**	**100**
Imo	I know	17	14
	I don't know	81	64
	Can't Say	28	22
	Total	**126**	**100**
Total		**384**	**100**

Source: Researcher's Computation (2025)

Research question two sought to the level of awareness of the respondents about international, national and state laws or legal position on gender victimisation and widowhood practices in their various States. Results reveal that more than 70% of respondents in the area of study are not aware of the laws on gender victimisation and widowhood practices at international, national and state levels.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research question one was designed to ascertain the level of knowledge of the respondents about gender victimisation and harmful widowhood practices in the South-East. The study revealed that the majority of the respondents indicated overall majority of the respondents in the three States under study - Anambra, Enugu and Imo States accounting for over 90% indicated that they are aware of the phenomenon of gender victimisation and harmful widowhood practices in the Southeast. In Anambra State, 95% stated that they know about discriminations against widows while only 5% ticked that they don't know; in Enugu and Imo majority know and less than 6% saying they don't know or can't say.

Research question two dwelt on the level of awareness of the respondents about international, national and state laws or legal position on gender victimisation and widowhood practices in their various States. Results reveal that more than 70% of respondents in the area of study are not aware of the laws on gender victimisation and widowhood practices at international, national and state levels.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It can be concluded that interpersonal communication and various in the community is key is addressing the challenges of gender victimisation and harmful widowhood practices. Based on the research findings the following recommendations were made;

1. Women advocacy group and other agencies should engage various media of communication especially the social networking services in disseminating worrying stories of harmful widowhood practices and gender victimization.
2. The Federal, State and local government must of necessity do more to create awareness of the extant laws and legal provisions on harmful widowhood practices and gender victimization through various communication channels, mainstream, social media and traditional/Ora media.

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