

***Sources of Stress and Adjustment Strategies of Childless Widows in Kwara State, Nigeria***

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**Abstract**

*This study investigated the sources of stress and adjustment strategies of childless widows in Kwara State. The research design adopted for the study was survey research design. The population comprised childless widows in Kwara State. One hundred childless widows were selected using purposive sampling technique. Sources of Stress and Adjustment Strategies of Childless Widows Questionnaire (SOSASOCWQ), developed by the researchers, was used to obtain data from the respondents and were analysed using mean and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Four null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. Result obtained showed that socio-psychological stressors and financial stressors are major sources of stress for childless widows; and ways of adjustment include visiting friends, relatives and engaging in petty trading. The findings of the study revealed that there is no significant difference in the sources of stress and adjustment strategies of childless widows based on age at bereavement and educational level. It was therefore recommended, among others, that counsellors should organize comprehensive community education*

*programmes to sensitize and enlighten the widows on how to minimize stress and adjust to stress effectively.*

**Keywords:** childless, widows, stress, adjustment, strategies

### **Introduction**

The changing population profile in society has brought about increased attention to family events in life. One of such events is widowhood. Widowhood is a significantly distressing event in the life of women. Widowhood is the state of having lost one's spouse to death and the person is yet to remarry. Death, most especially of a close or intimate person, is a great loss which is often followed by grief. The death of a relation is mourned differently depending on culture. Cultural manifestation in this is seen in intense wailing, weeping, seclusion and general isolation, choice of dressing and socialization and hysteria. These are bound to generate diverse experiences which could result to different dimensions of stress to the widows, especially the childless widows.

Death of spouse tends to affect both genders in diverse ways and the psychological effects are immense on widows. This is because of some cultural practices and role expectations that prescribe intense wailing, seclusion and general isolation for the widows in Nigeria. Widowhood is often followed by symptoms of emotional distress, health challenges and economic difficulty. Anderson and Ray (2018) reported higher rates of physical illnesses and mortality amongst widows compared to their married counterparts. Severe psychological sufferings in the nature of loneliness, depression, obsessive thoughts, restlessness, insomnia, somatic complaints, hallucinations, and poor mental well-being have been reported among widows (Nalungwe, 2009). The death of the husband not only interrupts a woman's social world but also cuts her relationships with family. When widows, especially the childless ones, lose their husbands, they feel very much dejected, socially isolated, secluded and withdrawn. This may lead to a higher incidence of behavioural disorder and higher suicide rates.

It is worthy of note that widowhood experience is not the same globally. The experiences of widows from a middle class may be quite different from those from the high socioeconomic class. The disorganization and trauma that accompany the loss of spouse is great. Williams (2008), while expressing her personal experience, stated that widowhood is a new life, strange, alien and different from anything one has ever known. She stated further that widows face series of problems such as economic challenges, emotional tailspin, physical changes and social deprivation. Gina (2009) maintained that the toughest challenges are the emotional shock, and loneliness. Widows in rural areas of Nigeria have been described as the most vulnerable and marginalized group, given the ill-treatments they receive. As reported by Ugwu, Orjiakor, Ugwu, Ezedum, Ngwoke and Ezebuilo (2020), there are an estimated 250

million widows in the world, many of who experience peculiar difficulties and deprivations that impact their livelihood, health and well-being (The Loomba Foundation, 2015; United Nations, 2019).

Childless widows are a group whose plight may be worse, given socio-cultural circumstances (Ugwu, et al, 2020). Childless widows are a group of widows that may endure protracted impact of widowhood in Africa, given cultural values placed on having children (Matthias, 2015). Having child(ren) is socially desirable in many parts of Africa including Nigeria. There is probably no news that is more delightful to receive than that of a new born baby. Traditionally, children are valued for their assistance in production, leisure time activities, illness and security. Having children may lessen the burden of widowhood. Children are sometimes the connection between a widow and the husband's relatives as children often have inheritance rights to their fathers' property (Milazzo & Van de Walle, 2018).

Stress is nothing but a normal physiological reaction of the body to situations or stimuli which is dangerous to the body. It has been defined as the body's and mind's way of meeting a challenge (Elsie & Ugwu, 2017). According to Travedi, Himanshu and Mohan (2009), widowhood is a distressing event in the life of an individual, with associated psychological ramifications. They stated further that the problems are further complicated among women owing to specific social and cultural aspects which lead to increased feeling of self-blame, regret and unfriendliness. Childlessness in itself is the main source of stress to a childless widow. Children are wonderful and can bring wonderful and meaningful gifts into a given family. However, the absence of children results to stress for a woman which disrupts her routines in life if adequate care is not taken.

According to Kami and Karina (2009), childless women who had experienced pregnancy loss or failure to conceive reported the lowest life satisfaction and high level of depression despite a considerable amount of time. It is seen in Nigeria that women who are unable to bear a child but then become widows are maligned by people, thrown out of their matrimonial homes and mostly denied of their inheritance. The few who are fortunate to remain in their matrimonial homes experience humiliation, beating, stigmatization and mental torture, most especially from other women who have children. The life of a childless widow is more at risk compared with those with children. In some communities, as stated by McCrummen (2008), women who died without having a child are carried in their coffins through the back door of the church. Societal stigmatization on women with no child(ren) in Africa aggravates stress in childless widows.

A widowed person is expected to live with all the consequences of grief and bereavement over a period of time. The widow, especially the childless widow, is to realize her distinctiveness from other married women in the society. The realization calls for more concrete and realistic approaches that would enable her to adjust to and withstand the challenges of the new life pattern resulting from widowhood.

Adjustment is an ability to live in agreement with the environment. In effect, adjustment to widowhood means acceptance of the new condition of widowhood and lack of children with no feeling of depression or rejection. The manner and strategies adopted by widows to adjust to stress differ. Variables such as socioeconomic level, educational status and environment or social norms concerning widows may determine the experiences of widows and how they adjust to distressing nature of widowhood.

Several studies (Akinlabi, 2013; Bala, 2015; Elsie & Ugwu, 2017; Iruloh & Elsie, 2018;) have been conducted on widowhood generally, Suleiman (2010) conducted a study on the problems and adjustment needs of literate widows in Kwara State with preference to age when married, bereavement period, religion, type of family, type of job and highest educational qualification. Purposive sampling technique was employed for selecting a sample of 400 respondents for the study from the three senatorial districts of the state. The research instrument used was tagged “Problems and Adjustment Needs of Widows Questionnaire” (PANWQ). The study found out that widows in Kwara State have acute problem and adjustment needs. The main findings of the study showed that psychological problems are the most serious or commonest problem confronting widows, followed by financial, social and health problems. The finding also revealed that significant differences were found based on age when married, type of family, type of job and highest educational qualifications. However, on the basis of length of bereavement and religion, no significant difference was found in the problems encountered by widows.

Akinlabi (2013) carried out a study to examine the differences that existed between young and old widows and their amenability to coping mechanism and resources. Descriptive research design was adopted. A self-designed instrument titled ‘Young and Old Vulnerable Widows Questionnaire’ (YOVWQ) was administered on randomly selected 100 young and old widows that were randomly selected using multistage sampling technique involving stratified and purposive sampling techniques. The analysis of the data revealed that respondents (old and young widows) did not differ in their coping strategies and mechanisms.

Bala (2015) investigated the plight and adjustment strategies of widows in Danko Wasagu Local Government Area of Kebbi State. Descriptive survey design was adopted. Purposive sampling technique was employed for selecting a sample of 500

respondents from four selected areas of the local government i.e. Ribah, Danko, Yar'ali and Rambo. A researcher developed instrument tagged "Problems and Adjustment Needs of Widows Questionnaire (PANWQ)" was used. The main findings of the study showed that psychological problems were the most serious for widows in Danko Wasagu Local Government Area of Kebbi State. The results showed that economic problems and social problems have an effect on the adjustment strategies of widows.

Another study was conducted to determine the extent of adjustment among widows in Bayelsa State (Uche, 2015). The ex-post facto design was used and a sample size of 200 was sampled through probability sampling technique. Two hypotheses were formulated and data were collected using questionnaire. The results of independent t-test analysis revealed that widowhood adjustment significantly differed on the bases of spirituality and age. It was concluded that adjustment tend to be easier for widows of higher spiritual level and those who are older

Elsie and Ugwu (2017) conducted a study to determine the extent to which age and educational level influence adjustment strategies to widowhood stress among widows in Rivers State, Nigeria. Using descriptive survey design, two research questions and hypotheses guided the study. A sample of 370 widows in Rivers State was drawn from the population through proportional, stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Two researcher developed instruments; Stress Level Scale for Widows (SLSW) and Questionnaire for Widows Adjustment Strategies (QWAS) were used for data collection. Results showed that widows in Rivers State differ significantly in their adjustment strategies to widowhood stress on the basis of age and educational attainment.

Iruloh and Elsie (2018) carried out a study aimed at investigating influence of age on adjustment strategies employed by widows in coping with widowhood stress in Rivers State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Two research questions and one hypothesis guided the conduct of the study at 0.05 significant level. A sample of 370 widows in Rivers State was drawn from the population via proportional, stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Two instruments namely, Stress Level Scale for Widows (SLSW) and Questionnaire for Widows Adjustment Strategies (QWAS), both developed by the researchers, were used for data collection. Data were analyzed with mean, standard deviation and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Results showed that all the eight adjustment strategies (problem solving, cognitive restructuring, express emotion, social support, problem avoidance, wishful thinking, self-criticism and social withdrawal) are adopted by widows in ameliorating widowhood stress; there are slight differences among the mean values of the different age groups with regards to all the adjustment strategies of widows to

widowhood stress. The concern of this paper is to investigate the sources of stress and adjustment strategies of childless widows in Kwara State of Nigeria considering their age at bereavement and educational level.

### **Statement of the problem**

Widowhood is a significantly distressing event in the life of an individual experiencing it with psychological and economic ramifications. These plights are further compounded among women owing to peculiar social and cultural expectations associated with widowhood. They are into a new life which poses diverse expectations, problems and changes. Disruption of marriage by death brings loneliness, loss of financial support and emotional trauma. In typical African society, the main function of marriage is bearing children and this is accorded great value. Its absence creates tension in the family and may likely crush marriages in mud. There is paucity of studies in the area of childless widows; previous studies on sources of stress and adjustment strategies had focused on widows generally leading to a gap on the specificity of childless widows. Therefore, this study aimed at investigating the sources of stress and adjustment of childless widows in Kwara State considering their age at bereavement and educational level.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the sources of stress among childless widows in Kwara State, Nigeria?
2. What are the adjustment strategies adopted among childless widows in Kwara State, Nigeria?

### **Hypotheses**

**Ho1:** There is no significant difference in the sources of stress among childless widows in Kwara State on the basis of age at bereavement.

**Ho2:** There is no significant difference in the adjustment strategies adopted by childless widows in Kwara State on the basis of age at bereavement.

**Ho3:** There is no significant difference in the sources of stress among childless widows in Kwara State on the basis of educational level.

**Ho4:** There is no significant difference in the adjustment strategies adopted by childless widows in Kwara State on the basis of educational level.

### **Methodology**

The research design that was adopted for this study is survey design. A survey method concerns itself with the present, and attempts to determine the current status of the phenomena under investigation. The choice of survey therefore, is to elicit information on the sources of stress and adjustment strategies of childless widows in Kwara State. The sample for the study comprised of one hundred (100) childless widows purposively selected from the three senatorial districts of Kwara State. This was carried out by scouting for childless widows from women organizations and religious groups in the state. The choice of purposive sampling is that it ensures gathering data from respondents who possess peculiar characteristics of investigation.

A questionnaire tagged Sources of Stress and Adjustment Strategies of Childless Widows Questionnaire (SOSASCWQ) was utilized for the study. It was adapted from Stress Rating Scale for widows and Widows Adjustment Strategies Questionnaire developed by Oniye (2000). The questionnaire (SOSASCWQ) has three sections including the demographic data, stress sources and adjustment strategies. The relevant demographic data of the respondents are mainly age at bereavement (20-30, 31-40, 41-50 and 51 and above) and educational level (below primary school, primary, secondary, NCE/ND, HND/First Degree, Masters and above). The forty (40) items in the questionnaire required the respondents to indicate the level of their acceptance or agreement with each of the items using the four point rating scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The instrument was found to have both face and content validity by experts in the field of Educational Psychology and Counselling, and Test and Measurement. Its measure of stability was established using test-re-test method and it has a reliability coefficient of 0.73 using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient.

The researchers established contacts with various social and religious groups in Kwara State where the respondents were found. Respondents who agreed to partake in the study were assured of confidentiality. A total of 125 copies of the instrument were administered; one hundred copies which were adequately filled were analysed for the study. The data were analysed using mean and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The mean was used to answer the research questions while ANOVA was used to test the research hypotheses at 0.05 significant level.

## Presentation of results

**Research Question 1:** What are the sources of stress among childless widows in Kwara State, Nigeria?

**Table 1:** Mean scores of childless widows stress sources

S/N	Childless widows experience stress through	Means	Remark
1.	Having to begin a new intimate relationship	2.66	Agree
2.	Having to cope with subtle isolation and mockery from inlaws	2.99	Agree
3	Getting involved in social activities	2.86	Agree
4.	Having to cope with living life alone without life time partner and child	3.06	Agree
5.	Having to create a new identity	2.96	Agree
6.	Receiving no support from in-laws due to inability to bear children	2.85	Agree
7.	Living without many of the material resources usually provided by late husband such as television, video etc	2.60	Agree
8.	Having to take an extra job to make money in order to meet financial needs e.g house rent, bills etc	3.07	Agree
9.	Receiving no support from religious groups	2.73	Agree
10.	Receiving no support from friends	2.61	Agree
11.	Having the feeling of not been able to make my husband happy before he died	2.49	Disagreed
12.	Having no close confidant	2.76	Agree
13.	Having to cope with trauma of infertility	2.85	Agree
14.	Having to sleep and wake up without a lover I could call mine	3.01	Agree
15.	Having to cope with the problem of stigmatization	2.61	Agree
16.	Having to accept the responsibility of the inability to bear children	2.68	Agree
17.	Having to subject oneself to dictates of in-laws in respect of decision concerning life	2.60	Agree
18.	Having to cope alone with domestic responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning etc	2.81	Agree
19.	Having to accept the responsibility of caring for the late husband's properties	3.04	Agree
20	Taking responsibility for my upkeep without the assistance of inlaws and friends	2.84	Agree



Table 1 reveals that majority of the childless widows experience stress from having to take an extra job to make money in order to meet their financial needs. This item has the highest mean score of 3.07. The lowest source of stress is having the feeling of not been able to make the deceased husband happy before he died with 2.49 mean score. The items with mean score above average 2.5 are more sources of stress of childless widow while that with less than 2.5 mean score are not regarded as sources of stress of childless widow. Based on the table, the respondents agree with items 1 – 5 (socio-psychological stressors), 6 - 10 (financial stressors) and 16 – 20 (Authority and responsibility stressors). However, they disagree with item 11 as a source of emotional stress but uphold items 12, 13, 14 and 15 as emotional stressors. A summary of the sources of stress among childless widows based on the four subsections of the stress sources is presented thus:

**Table 2: Summary of Stress Sources and their mean scores**

S/N	Childless widows experience stress through:	Means	Remark
1	Socio-psychological stressors	2.91	Agree
2	Financial stressors	2.77	Agree
3	Emotional stressors	2.74	Agree
4	Authority and Responsibility stressors	2.79	Agree

Table 2 reveals that the main source of stress of childless widows is socio-psychological stress involving the ideas of living alone, in isolation, with new identity and difficulty of creating an intimate relationship. Another stress experienced by the childless widows is authority and responsibility stressors. The childless widows face the challenge of taking care of themselves with little or no support from in-laws and friends, accepting the responsibility of barrenness or childlessness, and having to take decision on all matters concerning them. Following the Socio-psychological and authority and responsibility stressors, is the financial stress, as the childless widows have to seek extra jobs to earn a living, and the anxiety of being able to take care of bills due to inadequate or lack of support. Childless widows are faced with emotional trauma resulting from loss of loved ones, absence of close confidant, infertility and stigmatization. This is emotional stress for the childless widows.

**Research Question 2:** What are the adjustment strategies adopted among childless widows in Kwara State, Nigeria?

**Table 3:** Mean scores of childless widows' adjustment strategies

S/N	Childless widows adjust to stress by	Means	Remark
1.	Trying to forget about grief by interacting with others	3.04	Agree
2.	Visiting friends and relatives when bored	3.26	Agree
3.	Going to church/mosque when disturbed	2.96	Agree
4.	Taking part in social programmes in order to feel good	3.09	Agree
5.	Sharing feeling and experiences with adopted child(ren)	3.05	Agree
6.	Usually engaging in exercise to relief tension	3.05	Agree
7.	Usually spending some time with new male friend	2.53	Agree
8.	Accepting more leadership responsibilities in our association to give me less time to be alone	2.94	Agree
9.	Interacting with children to take away sorrow	2.97	Agree
10.	Registering for a training programme to acquire new skills for survival	3.05	Agree
11.	Reading lots of books, newspaper, novels etc to overcome boredom	3.09	Agree
12.	Participating in organized singing/drama show in Christian or Islamic gathering to forget bitter experiences	2.88	Agree
13.	Thinking for hours whenever I have problem(s) I cannot solve	2.55	Agree
14.	Reserving some time to be alone	2.58	Agree
15.	Sleeping for many hours to forget about my problem(s)	2.31	Disagree
16.	Sitting idly doing nothing when not okay	2.47	Disagree
17.	Taking extra doses of sleeping tablet when problems do not allow me to sleep	2.44	Disagree
18.	Requesting for money from in-laws for my up keep	2.22	Disagree
19.	Engaging in extra job to complement salary in solving financial problems	2.98	Agree
20.	Engaging in petty trading to raise money to take care of oneself	3.23	Agree

Table 3 indicates that majority of the childless widow adjust to stress by visiting friends and relative when bored. This item has the highest mean score of 3.26. Item 20 which states “engaging in petty trading to raise money to take care of oneself” with

the mean score of 3.23 was ranked next and requesting for money from in laws for upkeep has the lowest mean score of 2.22. All the items with the mean score of 2.5 and above were considered as adjustment strategies adopted by childless widows while those with mean scores less than 2.5 were not considered as options of strategies for adjustment. The childless widows do not consider sleeping for many hours to forget about my problem(s), sitting idly doing nothing when not okay, taking extra doses of sleeping tablet when problems do not allow me to sleep and requesting for money from in-laws for their upkeep, as ways of adjusting to their stresses.

**Ho1:** There is no significant difference in the sources of stress among childless widows in Kwara State on the basis of age at bereavement.

**Table 4:** Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on Sources of Stress Based on Age at Bereavement

Sources of Variable	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	df	Cal. f-ratio	critical f-ratio
Between Group	140.54	46.85	3		
Within Group	6706.82	69.86	96	0.67	2.68
Total	6847.36		99		

Table 4 shows the analysis of variance on stress sources among childless widows based on age at bereavement. The table indicates that there is no significant difference in the sources of stress among childless widows in Kwara State on the basis of age at bereavement. This is seen in the calculated F-ratio of 0.67 which is less than the critical F of 2.68. Therefore, hypothesis one is retained.

**Ho2:** There is no significant difference in the adjustment strategies adopted by childless widows in Kwara State on the basis of age at bereavement.

**Table 5:** Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on Stress Adjustment Strategies Based on Age at Bereavement

Sources of Variable	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	df	Cal. f-ratio	Critical f
Between Group	360.37	120.125	3		
Within Group	8103.02	84.40	96	1.42	2.68
Total	8463.39		99		

Table 5 shows that the calculated F-ratio is 1.42, while the critical F-ratio is 2.68. Since the calculated F is less than critical F, it means that there is no significant difference

in the adjustment strategies adopted by childless widows in Kwara State on the basis of age at bereavement. Therefore, hypothesis two is retained.

**Ho3:** There is no significant difference in the sources of stress among childless widows in Kwara State on the basis of educational level.

**Table 6:** Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on Sources of Stress Based on Educational Level

Sources of Variable	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	df	Cal. f-ratio	Critical f
Between Group	398.14	79.63	5		
Within Group	6449.22	68.61	94	1.16	2.29
Total	6847.36		99		

Table 6 shows the analysis of variance on the sources of stress among childless widows on the basis of educational levels. The table reveals a calculated F-ratio of 1.16 which is less than the critical F-ratio of 2.29. As a result, it was concluded that there is no significant difference in the sources of stress among childless widows in Kwara State on the basis of educational level. Hypothesis three is therefore retained.

**Ho4:** There is no significant difference in the adjustment strategies adopted by childless widows in Kwara State on the basis of educational level.

**Table 7:** Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on Stress Adjustment Strategies Based on Educational Level

Sources of Variable	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	df	Cal. f-ratio	Critical f-ratio
Between Group	154.25	30.85	5	0.35	2.29
Within Group	8309.14	88.40	94		
Total	8463.39		99		

Table 7 result indicates that there is no significant difference in the adjustment strategies adopted by childless widows in Kwara State on the basis of educational level. This is because the calculated F-ratio of 0.35 is less than the critical F-ratio of 2.29. Therefore hypothesis four is retained.

### Discussion of the findings

The result of the study showed that childless widows are faced with challenges that result to stress. Analysis of the twenty items on the sources of stress among childless widows revealed that item 8 which states that having to take an extra job to make money in order to meet financial needs was ranked highest with mean score of 3.07,

while item 11 had the lowest mean. The summary of the sources of stress among childless widows grouped into four factors indicates that most sources of stress among childless widows are the socio-psychological stressors with average mean score of 2.91. According to Bala (2015) and Suleiman (2010), psychological problems were the most serious and commonest problem confronting widows in general. Ugwu et al (2020) stated that abandonment re-echoed in the accounts of the widows; they felt left to their own fate and they were not cared for by their families and communities. This shows that lack of child that supposed to be a source of support, abandonment and loneliness pose socio-psychological stress to the childless widows. The presence of child(ren) would help the childless widows to adjust to an extent to stress.

Another source of stress is authority and responsibility stressors with average mean of 2.79. This is accompanied with financial stressors. This is in line with the submission of Williams (2008) that it can be difficult for a widow dealing with financial aspect of life which is brought by the loss of bread winner. Suleiman (2010) revealed that financial problem is also a major problem and source of stress among widows in which childless widows are not exempted. Emotional stressors resulting from the loss of a partner, and most especially the problem of infertility or lack of a child is seen among childless widows in Kwara State as stressors. This finding resonates with the narrative study of Ugwu et al (2020), which find out that both widowhood and (involuntary) childlessness are considered heavy misfortunes, so much that these widows are blamed for their misfortunes. Thus, there is a strong stigma and segregation meted against this group (childless widows) which impact their livelihood and wellbeing.

The sources of stress of childless widows are complex and therefore adjustment may depend on the stressor. The analysis of the twenty items on the adjustment strategies adopted by childless widows as shown on table 3 indicated that visiting friends and relatives when bored is the most ranked strategy with mean score of 3.26. Rank next is engaging in petty trading to raise money to take care of oneself with mean score of 3.23. Ability to make some money to take care of self and other necessary needs can be comforting, thereby easing stress. Some of the adjustment strategies adopted by childless widows include going to church/mosque when disturbed, spending some time with new male friend, accepting more leadership responsibilities in an association they belong to give them less time to be alone, registering for a training programme to acquire new skills for survival and participating in organized singing/drama show in Christian or Islamic gathering to forget bitter experiences.

The findings of the study indicated that childless widows do not consider sleeping for many hours to forget about problem(s), sitting idly doing nothing when not okay, taking extra doses of sleeping tablet when problems do not allow them to sleep and requesting for money from in-laws for their up keep, as ways of adjusting to their

stresses. This may be due to realization that all these do not in the real sense address their problems rather complicate it the more.

The finding of this study revealed that there is no significant difference in the sources of stress among childless widows in Kwara State on the basis of age at bereavement. This is in congruence with the finding of Akinlabi (2013) which revealed that both old and young did not differ in their experience of grief. On the basis of age, the study also revealed that there is no significant difference in the adjustment strategies adopted among childless widows in Kwara State. In support of this finding is the result of the study conducted by Akinlabi (2013) which revealed that there is no significant difference in the coping strategies adopted by widows generally on the basis of age. Both old and young did not differ in their adjustment strategies and mechanisms. Conversely, Uche (2015) and Iruloh and Elsie (2018), found in their various studies that widowhood adjustment significantly differs on the basis of age; that is adjustment tend to be easier for older widows than younger widows. This contradiction may however be due to the fact that the current study focuses on the childless widow which is a fraction of the generality of widow population.

The findings of this study also revealed that on the basis of educational levels, there is no significant difference in the sources of stress and adjustment strategies adopted among childless widows in Kwara State. This finding contradicts similar studies by Suleiman (2010), Bala (2015) and Elsie and Ugwu (2017) who found out in their various studies that the adjustment strategies adopted by widows to cope with their widowhood stress differ significantly among widows on the basis of educational levels. This implies that educational levels of widows influence their adjustment strategies adopted to widowhood stress.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings obtained from this study, it is concluded that childless widows' sources of stress include socio-psychological, authority and responsibility, financial and emotional stressors. Childless widows have more distressing issues than the general widowhood problems. They seem to be more secluded, isolated and stigmatized than other widows especially in the African socio cultural peculiarity. Instead of being sympathized and empathized with, they end up unsupported, receiving cruel treatment and molestation.

### **Implications for Counselling**

The findings of this study have a number of implications for counselling and the entire society. The fact that widowhood is stressful irrespective of age at which it occurs and educational level, the counsellors, government and non-governmental organizations need to pay special attention to the plight of the widows in general and childless

widows in particular to ease their suffering and prevent suicide or ideation. It is important for counsellors to give orientation to religious leaders about modern ways of therapy. Information is an integral part of counselling, it is therefore important for counsellors to organize seminars for widows on various aspects of their lives.

Constant stress has far-reaching consequences on the physical and mental health of childless widows. One of the pathological (abnormal) consequences of stress is learned helplessness and many illnesses such as chronic anxiety state, high blood pressure, heart diseases and addictive disorder. A comprehensive community education programme needs to be mounted by government and non-governmental organizations to sensitize and enlighten widows on how to minimize and adjust to stress.

### **Recommendations**

In the light of the research findings, the study recommends as follows:

- 1) Death is inevitable; therefore, widowhood and bereavement counselling should be incorporated into the curriculum of counsellor education in Nigerian tertiary institutions. This will provide them with insight into the reality of life and death.
- 2) Counsellors should organize comprehensive community education programmes to sensitize and enlighten the widows on how to minimize stress and adjust to stress effectively.
- 3) A massive public campaign should be organized to advocate against the discriminatory and parochial approach in the mourning rites and widowhood practices in Nigeria and also legislation should be made against barbaric widowhood culture.
- 4) Counsellors should be well trained and equipped with skills and tools to handle childless widows in Kwara State because childless widows are peculiar fraction of widows' population.
- 5) Religious leaders should be encouraged to preach against certain widowhood practices that cause more painful experiences.
- 6) Empowerment of women through education is necessary. This will equip them with knowledge about their fundamental human rights and the unsafe implications of widowhood practices in the society such as deprivation of deserved inheritance, irrational customs or traditions of performing certain rites of purification. Therefore, government should take, as a matter of priority, the education of women/girls child in Nigeria.

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