
IMPLICATIONS OF WIDOWHOOD FOR CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL CONTINUITY IN YENAGOA, BAYELSA STATE

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Abstract

This study examines the lived experiences of widows and the socioeconomic implications of widowhood for children's educational continuity in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. The study argues that widows face life-altering realities as a result of widowhood that extend beyond physical, cultural, emotional, and psychological turmoil. However, widowhood also has economic implications, such as poverty and income loss, that affect their capacity for survival, sustenance, and stability within the household. Drawing from this argument, the study interrogates how poverty and income loss affect the educational continuity of the children of widows. The study adopted a qualitative research design and collected data through individual in-depth interviews with 12 purposively sampled widows in the Atissa Clan of Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, as well as complementing it with secondary sources. The study found that while poverty and income loss affect widows, given that most women in Yenagoa are economically productive and dominate the informal sector, children's educational continuity is less affected. Furthermore, the study found that in Atissa, Yenagoa, women are culturally accustomed to providing educational support for their children; the

death of their husbands does not disrupt the children's education. The study recommends women's economic empowerment as a step towards socioeconomic adjustment to widowhood.

Keywords: Widowhood, Educational continuity, Poverty, Income loss, Widows, Children of widows

Introduction

Widowhood, a situation that arises as a result of the death of one's husband or wife, has been studied and found to have multidimensional consequences for the surviving partners, such as psychological, social, emotional, spiritual, and even economic impacts (Iruloh& Elsie, 2018; Fred & Dimkpa, 2025). However, the lived experiences and realities of widowhood differ considerably from person to person and society to society. Yet in most cases, widowhood affects women rather negatively than men, exposing them to social and cultural stigma, isolation, economic hardship, ill health and stress (Fakoya, et al., 2020). As several studies show for widows or women who lose their husbands, widowhood results in life-altering experiences. For many widows, widowhood goes beyond navigating grief and loneliness; it is a major economic transformation for them, leading to financial instability and income loss, and for those without skills and education, a period of unemployment and economic hardship.

The literature suggests that widowhood carries diverse consequences. According to Ubodiom and Ifidi (2025), the realities for widows in Yenagoa are all social, psychological, and economic. As Akani (2018) argued, the lived realities and experiences of widows are ones of stigmatisation and exclusion. When women are framed as the killers of their husbands due to allegations of witchcraft, they are denied his properties, family or economic support to help them navigate grief. However, it has been argued that widowhood carries significant economic consequences that affect not only women but their children also. In culturally diverse societies such as India and Nigeria, Hossain and James (2024) argued that the economics of widowhood have been firmly established because widows suffer from poverty, poor health and poor economic status as a result.

Several studies have increasingly revealed that widowhood carries serious socioeconomic implications for widows (Ayodele, 2016; Eboiyehi & Akinyemi, 2016; Ugwu et al., 2020). Existing studies have looked at the effect of widowhood on poverty for widows (Genyi & George-Genyi, 2013). Mwanja and Nzengya (2025) focus on income loss as a major aspect. In this study, Eboiyehi and Akinyemi (2016) point to economic and asset dispossession of widows as a result of cultural practices. However, while these studies have significantly contributed to exploring the socioeconomic impact of widowhood there have been no empirical studies that have interrogated the socioeconomic implications of widowhood on the educational continuity of children in Bayelsa State, especially within Yenagoa LGA. This study therefore examined the socioeconomic implications of widowhood for the educational continuity of children of widows in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. The specific objectives are to:

- i. examine how poverty and income loss resulting from widowhood affect the educational continuity of children of widows in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State; and
- ii. assess the coping strategies widows employ to sustain their children's educational continuity following the death of their husbands.

Research Questions

- I. How has widowhood-related income loss affected the educational continuity of children of widows in Yenagoa?
- ii. In what ways does the loss of household income following widowhood influence widows' ability to support their children's schooling?

Methods

The study employed the qualitative research design to critically examine the lived experiences of widows and the socioeconomic implications for their children's educational continuity in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. The adoption of the qualitative research design is considered fitting, as it allows the researcher to collect relevant qualitative data that reveals more about the experiences of widows and subject these data to critical analysis where relevant conclusions can be drawn (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Data for the study is obtained from primary and secondary sources. The primary data was obtained from

an individual in-depth interview (IDI) from 12 selected widows from 6 communities in the Atissa Kingdom in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. Secondary data was obtained from journal articles, textbooks, and relevant news reports. The study's sample is made up of 12 purposively selected widows living in communities in Atissa-Epie, Yenagoa LGA, Bayelsa State, who have first-hand lived experience of widowhood and its socioeconomic impacts and can provide relevant information on its consequences on their children's educational continuity.

Table 1 List of Respondents

S/N	Communities of Respondents	Number of Respondents
1.	Ovom	2
2.	Ogbogoro	2
3.	Famgbe	2
4.	Akaba	2
5.	Ogu	2
6.	Ebebelebriri	2
	Total	12

Source: Author's compilation (2026)

The study analysed data using descriptive analysis of qualitative responses drawn from individual in-depth interviews with 12 purposively sampled widows in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

Results

Results show that the lived experiences of widows navigating widowhood cannot be captured as a monolith, given that different people experience loss and death differently. The study found that the weight or burden of widowhood on widows is heavy and multidimensional. For many women, widowhood throws them into new realities where they have to navigate social acceptance, economic hardship, grief, loneliness and cultural practices that heighten the burden of their loss on them. As one of the participants revealed, "The death of my husband exposed me and my children to the reality that we are alone. While death in our culture is a family loss, for me and my children, who lost a husband and father, it is a personal loss that will change our lives (004/43/Widow/Famgbe/Yenagoa/IDI).

The majority of the respondents revealed that the experience of the death of one's husband is first emotional and psychological before anything else; the realities of day-to-day disruption of an ordered life emerge after the burial of the deceased husband, and the widow is left to fend for her children without financial or family support. In this vein, a participant noted that “when I lost my husband, my day-to-day life changed drastically because I was not only losing a husband, but I was also losing a source of immediate support that no extended family could give me and my children” (001/38/Widow/Ovom/Yenagoa/IDI).

Widowhood can also be considered an economic phase: a consequential transitional period, especially for women who depend on their husbands financially. Thus, women's lived experiences go beyond grief to include factors that shape their survival, sustainability, and stability. As a result, the socioeconomic impact of widowhood has been considered multidimensional, such as the loss of income, the dispossession of economic assets, a high risk of poverty, and health challenges due to economic uncertainty and unemployment. All of these also affect the children and their own lived experiences.

Results show that widowhood disrupts the economic stability of women and the family at large. The study found that widowhood carries serious economic consequences, such as a reduction in family or household income, a fall in the standard of living, and increased poverty for most families in Yenagoa. One of the significant issues that widowhood presents for most women is the difficulties that they face from losing their husbands, who provide important financial support for the entire household. Although in Yenagoa, women dominate the informal sector and are economic contributors to their households, widowhood results in a single-income household when they lose their husbands.

One respondent noted that:

Before my husband died, both of us were working. He used to work in the local government, and I am a farmer and petty trader. I sell fufu (processed cassava). So both of us take care of the family. Even though things used to be difficult, we managed better. But since he died, things have been difficult. Now I am the only one to care for the family (002).

Another participant corroborated the economic difficulties she has faced since her husband's death, stating that:

When my husband died, things were not easy for us. We have six children together. Imagine one person responsible for feeding all of them with my small business. We suffer because sometimes we cannot eat as we used to when he was alive to support the family (008).

Also, it was added that:

All I can say is that it was not easy. We all know how things have become difficult in Nigeria and Bayelsa. The price of garri has increased. Fish in the market has increased. While my husband and people also support me, most of the daily expenses are on me, and it is difficult to fulfil them (005).

One of the major economic realities found across participants is the loss or disruption of their family income as a result of widowhood. Widowhood uproots most widows from the financial or economic lifestyle they experienced with the support of their partners or husbands, thrusting them into a strangely difficult reality.

The first major shock after the death of my husband is that there is no longer monthly support coming to the household I used to expect for feeding and meeting basic expenses. I was left to figure out everything myself. It was not only difficult but exhausting.

Another participant noted that:

In my case, I was not only forced into feeding my children alone, but I was also forced into paying house rents and, when they were sick, buying drugs and ensuring that they wore clothes. I got into debt and borrowed money just to survive.

The burden of caring for an entire family alone creates particular difficulties that affect their capacity to meet all of the children's financial obligations, such as schooling and others. As such, for many

families, the study reveals that educational (dis)continuity is a critical issue that widows confront in their new role as financial providers for their children. However, the study shows that in most families where the women already provide or have a source of income, they tend to navigate better than those who do not. Results show that the experiences of women in widowhood and their socioeconomic precarity affect not only them but also their children. The responses of the participants show that the economic and financial difficulties that they face affect more than their ability to provide food and other basic amenities; they also affect their ability to provide the educational needs of their children. As one respondent noted:

Since my husband died, it has been difficult to send my children to school. I have changed their school from a private to a government school because of the school fees. I have to change because I do not want them to stop school. Even though these government schools still teach poorly (003).

Most widows encounter difficulties in paying school fees due to their previous cooperative partnership with their husbands in managing household responsibilities. A participant response supports this assertion:

Before now, paying school fees was easier because their father and I joined together. Since his death, I am the only one to do it. I have to look for a way to feed them and pay their schools and ensure they keep going to school (001).

The above highlights the fact that widows' economic difficulties affect children's education, yet it is not a sufficient reason for their children to discontinue education. Furthermore, widows face a significant burden that exceeds the payment of fees. The cost of other essential school supplies they must purchase adds to the financial burden and complicates the process of ensuring their children's education continues or is discontinued. A participant stressed that:

It is challenging for one person to ensure that at least four children remain in school, especially since I rely on my small business for support. Notebooks, new

uniforms, school bags, sandals, and textbooks are all expensive now. What I do to keep them in school is that they hawk and support the family too (007).

Some participants said they had to make critical changes to keep their kids in school despite financial issues. Others believe that due to the importance of education in gaining government employment and upskilling their children for the future, the question is not about discontinuing their education but ensuring different ways that will ensure that they continue. One participant noted the following:

I have sold personal belongings to ensure that my children stay in school. I owe a debt to keep them in school. Education is an investment that debt should not stop. For me, I believe that if my children go to school, this suffering that we have today, we won't have tomorrow.

The above illustrates the point that widowhood puts women in critical financial conditions. However, their ability to effectively adjust will determine their children's educational continuity. As most of the respondents have shown, there is a higher chance of them supporting the continuity of their children when widows see the importance of education.

Discussions

The study confirms the findings of several studies that reveal that widowhood causes women to be economically vulnerable, as usually they face situations of economic dispossession, loss of inheritance, loss of family support, and poverty, among others. This finding corroborates the findings of Norell-Pejner and Karlsson (2023), which reveal that a critical aspect of widowhood for women is the financial difficulty and uncertainty they are thrown into. Furthermore, Adeyemo (2014) found that widowhood leaves widows and their children in economic difficulties. This situation often arises in households where the father or husband is the economic contributor to their survival. However, the study found that women with economic means of livelihood experience a significant reduction due to widowhood (Nnodim et al., 2012). Despite these findings, most

women still feel the strain on their income, and the chances of them falling into poverty are high.

This study is consistent with the findings of existing studies, which highlight that income has severe implications for the family's income. However, previous studies argue that in a single-income household relying on the father's or husband's income for material support, his death is not just a physical loss; it also has significant economic and financial implications for both the wife and children who suffer. While this study agrees on the basis of the income disruption that widowhood creates, it noted that for most women with income, the burden shifts. Although the burden is enormous, widows often live in poor financial conditions, face a decline in their standard of living, and experience poverty alongside negative psychological issues such as loneliness and frustration. They tend to manage better and meet their children's needs.

The study reveals that one of the immediate and severe consequences of widowhood for widows is the loss of income as a result of the husband's death. Akanle and Nwaobiala (2020) noted that in many Nigerian homes, the father or husband is the breadwinner. Thus, when the husband or father dies, the household loses their source of income, their sense of socioeconomic protection, and the safety net that guarantees the provision of food, access to healthcare, education, and so on. Additionally, Aderemi and Ogebe (2024) note that widowhood often leads to poverty for widows in most parts of Nigeria, as they are left without their husbands' pensions, employment benefits, or insurance that would have helped them cater to the needs of their families.

Poverty is another socioeconomic difficulty that widows and their children tend to face. According to Ugwu et al. (2020), widows did not have economic means of survival: no businesses, employment or investment. Brown and Van de Walle (2021) found that these women often have higher chances of falling into poverty; the result of this is that the entire household that depends on them also becomes poor. Aderemi and Ogebe (2024) have also found that older women face a

higher likelihood of poverty than younger women.

The study found that all the loss of income and the increased poverty that widows face as a result of widowhood significantly affect the continuity of the children's education. This situation occurs when widows are compelled to take on the responsibilities of their deceased husbands, which include meeting their families' needs by providing basic amenities (food, clothing, and shelter), educating their children, and covering medical expenses, among other duties. The lack of financial support from families often impacts on the children's chances of continuing or enrolling in school.

Conclusion

The study concludes that widowhood is a life-changing phenomenon, particularly for the socioeconomic livelihood, survival and sustenance of women in Yenagoa, Bayelsa, and Nigeria. The study noted that while the consequences of widowhood expose widows to difficult cultural, psychological, and physiological realities, the economic dimension carries a significant effect on their children, particularly on their educational continuity after the deaths of their husbands. Poverty and income loss are two critical economic realities that widows have to go through that affect their ability to ensure their children continue education. However, the study noted that while this is true for most women, widows with prior economic livelihoods adjust better and ensure that their children continue their education despite the financial changes they face.

Recommendations

The study recommends that economic empowerment of widows and women, both within marriages and in broader society, is a necessary intervention for reducing the financial vulnerability that widowhood produces. When women enter widowhood without independent economic capacity, children's education becomes an immediate casualty. Family support networks must therefore complement economic empowerment by providing widows and their children with the social scaffolding needed to maintain educational continuity regardless of financial disruption or other destabilising factors.

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