

Skills Acquisition by Widows' Children in the Rural Areas of Ekiti State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The cluster sampling technique was used to examine the type of and factors affecting skills acquisitions by widows' children in the rural areas of Ekiti State, Nigeria. Most widows and their children were denied access to the deceased properties and left uncared for hence many of the widows remained unmarried, some remarried while few were inherited. Women involved in bigamy and polygamous marriages had restricted access to their husbands' properties irrespective of their status as wives or widows. Skill acquisition was observed to have potentials to alleviating their livelihood poverty. The idea that the widows' children should acquire skills was primarily conceived by their mothers and relatives while self decision and/or determination as well as mothers' mentorship accounted for the secondary factors. The skills acquired by males were mostly technical and females vocational skills. Strategies that could enhance and sustain skills acquisition among the children of widows were recommended.

Key words: Skills, widows, levirate, rural areas, Nigeria

1.0 Introduction

There has been an avalanche of studies on widowhood in Nigeria in the recent times. The act has been noted for the hardship it has on widows and their children (Adeyemo 2014). In Nigeria, the death of the father signifies a closure of provision for the family (Ogundipe 2009, Olaniyi 2010), especially on the family finance (Oloko 1997). Indeed, Falana (2013) expressed the family situation more accurately. According to him, the bereaved are discomfited in handling various

life issues in the absence of the deceased. Such issues included the care for the children, extended relatives, deceased estate and properties, deceased uncompleted projects and dreams.

Widowhood becomes more frightening in societies ruled by culture. The south western part of Nigeria, housing Ekiti State, is a distinct area where cultural practises predominates issues. The culture of the indigenous Yoruba tribe of the state placed the burden of widowhood on the surviving wife or wives who now constitutes the widow(s). The widow is now seen as an object of inheritance to be shared with other properties of the deceased. The case of a young wife is even more complex, she is to be inherited and if she refused to be inherited, she will be denied access to the properties left behind by the deceased. Quite often, when she agreed to be inherited, she is treated as mere instrument for sexual satisfaction. Thus, the death of the spouse creates a 'loss-loss' situation for the widow.

The children of the deceased are also not immune to the harsh effects of the loss of their father. Their care and upbringing are often left in the hands of their widowed mothers. Falana (2013) asserted that the social and economic roles of women in the house and society changes with the loss of her spouse. Hence, the loss of a spouse, according to Holmes and Rahe (1967), is ranked as one of the most stressful of all potential life changes on life event scales. The widow and the children become disorganised. This is particularly worse in the rural areas of Nigeria where women are mostly unemployed, illiterates and poor. They lacked access to land and often discriminated against by native and government policies. Thus the high rates of poverty among widows, especially those living alone, remain a primary concern (Burkhauser 1994, Sandell and Iams 1997).

Present initiatives are suggesting that skill acquisition possess the potentials to alleviate poverty among widow and their children (Bhola 1994). Akpama and Andong (2008) asserted that skills acquisition is a tool for economic empowerment that can sustain widows and their children and expose them to all necessary economic opportunities leading to supportive services that can liberate them. Thus, they will be able to contribute to the economic development of their community (Ayatse 2013) and be recognised as active participating members of their society (Ojeifo 2013). The study being reported here therefore aimed to examine the type of and factors affecting skills acquisitions by widows' children in the rural areas of Ekiti State, Nigeria.

2.0 Methodology

The cluster sampling technique was used in this study. Ekiti State was divided into three districts based on the existing political delineation. These are Ekiti Central, Ekiti North and Ekiti South. While Ekiti Central and Ekiti North each possessed five local government areas (LGAs), Ekiti South has six LGAs. Two LGAs were selected from each district. The LGAs selected were Ijero and Ekiti West LGAs in Ekiti Central, Ilejemeje and Oye LGAs in Ekiti North, Gbonyin and Emure LGAs in Ekiti South district.

Five widows and a child each of the widows were identified in the rural areas of each of the LGAs and interviewed with the aid of a semi-structured questionnaire guide. Key informants, made up of staff of the Social Welfare Department, were identified in each LGA and interviewed. Secondary data were obtained from records, journals and newspapers.

3.0 Results

The socioeconomic classification of the respondents is shown in Table 1. 63% of the respondents were males, 37% were female. Also most of the respondents (63%) belonged to the age group of 15 to 25 years. The index of wealth used in the classification of the respondents' deceased fathers varied from one community to the other yet most of the deceased fathers, (90%), were of medium economic status who were mostly involved in agricultural activities. Most of the deceased were involved in monogamy (73%, Table 2). 40% of the deceased died of illness while accidents (30%) and suspected spiritual attacks (30%) were attributed for death of the others. 43% of the widows have since remained single, 40% remarried to new husbands and 17% inherited in the form of levirate. Remarriage and levirate were observed to be survival strategies by the widows. Widows that remarried were observed to be done so with the hope of getting assistance especially financial while those involved in levirate were observed to be young, unemployed and illiterates.

Table 1: Socioeconomic classification of widows' children sampled in the rural areas of Ekiti State, Nigeria

Feature	Description	Frequency	%
Sex	Male	19	63
	Female	11	37
Age (Yrs)	< 15	3	10
	15-25	19	63
	>25	8	27
Late father's economic status	Low	1	3
	Medium	27	90

Late father's occupation	High	2	7
	Agriculture	26	87
	Non-agriculture	4	13

Table 2: Demographic description of the sampled widows in the rural areas of Ekiti State, Nigeria

Feature	Description	Frequency	%
Late father's marital status	Monogamy	22	73
	Bigamy	5	17
	Polygamy	3	10
Cause of father's death	Illness	12	40
	Accident	9	30
	Suspected spiritual attack	9	30
Mother's present status	Remained single	13	43
	Engaged in Levirate	5	17
	Remarried	12	40

Most of the widow respondents (83%, Table 3) were unemployed before the demised of their husbands but 83% were now engaged in employment after the deaths of their husbands. It was observed that the widows involved in levirate still depended absolutely on their new husbands. Most of the women (73%) had unrestricted access to their husbands' properties before the deaths of the husbands but most of them (90%) now have restricted access as widows. It was observed that women involved in bigamy and polygamous marriages had restricted access to their husbands' properties irrespective of their status as the then wives or now widows.

Table 4 revealed the skill acquisition decisions of the widows’ children after the deaths of their fathers. The results obtained revealed that the idea that the children should acquire skills were primarily conceived by their mothers (40%) and relatives (27%) while self decision and/or determination as well as mothers’ mentorship accounted for the secondary factors.

Table 3: Employment and marital demography of sampled widow in the rural areas of Ekiti State, Nigeria

Description	Respondents			
	Before father’s death		After father’s death	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Mother’s employment status				
Employed	5	17	25	83
Unemployed	25	83	5	17
Mother’s access to husband properties				
Unrestricted	22	73	3	10
Restricted	8	27	27	90

Table 4: Skill acquisition decisions of sampled widows’ children in the rural areas of Ekiti State, Nigeria

Status	Idea Conception					
	Self	Mother	Relative	ROs	NGOs	Government

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	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Primary	5	17	12	40	8	27	2	7	2	7	1	3
Secondary	22	73	5	17	2	7	1	3	-	-	-	-
Mean	14	47	9	30	5	17	2	7	1	3	1	3

The skills acquired by the sampled widows' children are shown in Table 5. While the skills acquired by males were mostly technical skills, those of the females were skewed towards vocational skills. Table 5 revealed that driving of commercial motor cycles ranked highest (21%) among the skills embraced by males while tailoring ranked highest among the females (45%). Also the skills embraced were more diverse among the males than the females. While a total of 14 skills were identified among the males, females were restricted to only 4 skills.

Table 5: Skills acquired by sampled widows' children in rural areas of Ekiti State, Nigeria

Skills	Respondents					
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	Male		Female			
	F	%	F	%		
Art Work	1	5	-	-		
Barbing/Hair Dressing	1	5	4	36		
Bricklaying	1	5	-	-		
Carpentry	1	5	-	-		
Catering	-	-	1	5		
Driving (Motor Cycles)	4	21	-	-		

Driving (Vehicles)	1	5	-	-
Mechanics (Generators)	1	5	-	-
Mechanics (Motor Cycles)	1	5	-	-
Mechanics (Vehicles)	2	11	-	-
Painting	1	5	-	-
Panel Beating	1	5	-	-
Rewiring	1	5	-	-
Tailoring	2	11	5	45
Trading	-	-	2	18
Welding	1	5	-	-

4. 0 Conclusion

The results obtained in this study revealed that agriculture constituted the major occupation of the deceased husbands. Previous studies have asserted that agriculture is the major occupation of residents in Ekiti State. Indeed, Kayode (2010) revealed that over 70% of the Ekiti State population lived in the rural areas and were engaged in agriculture. Women in these areas were mostly unemployed and served as helpers to their husbands in the farms. Residents in rural areas of Nigeria are liable to diseases as they often lacked basic amenities especially pipe-borne water and modern medical facilities. Most of the deaths incurred by spouses of widows in this study were attributed to illness (Table 2). The rural areas also lacked motor able roads hence the wide increase in the use of commercial motorcycles, termed *Okada*, in the study area. The *Okadas* easily navigate narrow and bad roads especially in remote areas and are readily available at cheaper prices (Ezeibe et. al. 2017). Unfortunately, the rise in *okada* utilization has been accompanied by increased occurrences of risky driving, and accidents (Olowosagba 2016).

Deaths by accident, especially from motor-cycle and vehicles were reported in this study. The culture of the inhabitants of the study area also believed in spiritual attacks. Adewumi (2017) asserted that spiritual attack happens in the spiritual dimension of man. He contended further that man is a spirit that has a soul, which is encased in the body of flesh. Thus man exists in the physical and spiritual realms of the earth. Whatever happens to man in his physical dimension is reflected in his spiritual dimension and vice versa. It is on this basis that an attack on the spiritual dimension of man affects him in his physical life. Considerable proportions of deaths were attributed to spiritual attacks in this study.

It is unfortunate that, in this study area, when the husbands die, the wife or wives were often suspected to be the remote cause of such death. Hence the cultural aspect comes into action. The demise of the husband could be likened to stripping of woman naked in public. Falana (2013) described such loss as deadly loss that one can ever experience. The loss changes the widow's social and economic roles (Adeyemo 2014). All household tasks become their responsibilities. Widow then engages in survival strategies. Falana (2013) enumerated series of coping mechanisms engaged upon by widows in south west, Nigeria. This study tends to suggest that remarriage and levirate are vital aspects of coping strategies embarked upon by widows in the study area. This is further buttressed by the information provided by some single widows in this study that they were disinherited of their husband properties at the deaths of their husbands. Some of them refused to be inherited and were sanctioned appropriately. Most of them were left to cater for the children they had for the deceased.

This study revealed that the repulsive treatments that most of the widows were subjected to served as incentives that forced them to realise the economic potentials of skills acquisition hence considerable proportion of the widow respondents in this study acquired skills after the

deaths of their husbands as their access to spouses' properties and estates were mostly restricted as widows. This observation supported the previous assertions of Akpama and Andong (2008). These widows were located in the rural environment; they were mostly illiterates and poor. Oluwatusin (2014) have earlier asserted that widows' location, their level of education and economy dictates the maltreatments they received from their husbands' relations. Many of the widows in this study were restricted from their husbands' properties (Table 3). Thus widows' skills acquisition may be regarded as part of their coping strategies.

Also, widows' children were conscious of the poverty alleviation potentials of skill acquisitions. A crucial aspect of actualising these potentials is the conception of the idea that they should acquire skills. This study tends to support the assertions of Aruwa (2004) and Solomon (2007) that skills acquisition requires individual willingness to seek for investment opportunities and to establish and run such successfully. The conception of the idea is akin to entrepreneurship education which according to Ayatse (2013) is oriented towards different ways of realising opportunities and offer functional education for the youth and thus offers them the opportunity to be self employed and self oriented (Paul 2005) and serve as catalyst for economic growth and development. Results from this study (Table 4) revealed that the widows were the primary source of the idea conceptions that felicitated their children to develop interests in skill acquisitions while the children themselves constituted secondary factors by making decisions to actualise the ideas. On the average, the self determination and/or self acceptance of the need to actualise ideas and liberate oneself from shackles of poverty (47%, Table 4) aided skills acquisition in this study.

The skills acquired were gender specific. Males tend to embrace technical skills while females tend to embrace vocational skills. Previous study by Akpotohwo and Ehimen (2014) have

observed that there is the societal feeling that technical skills are only suitable for the male, and the female counterparts are discriminated against and discouraged from such type of career, since it is generally believed that technical skills development process are difficult. There is also the negative societal perception that technical skills are incompatible with mother's role, at home and that girls who take to such careers have slim chances of getting married. Thus these negative thoughts may influence the interest, self confidence among the female folk and reduce their ability and motivation to opt for careers in technical skills acquisition programmes. However, this study tends to suggest that the primary motivations for the acquired skills included the length of trainings (apprenticeship) and quickness of economic returns from the skill. The study revealed that driving of commercial motor cycles, *Okada*, ranked highest among the skills embraced by males while tailoring and hair dressing ranked highest among the females. These skills required only basic education to accomplish them. It was observed that minimum apprenticeship period of six months are required for *Okada* driving and hair dressing while tailoring required a minimum period of one year. These skills also maintained considerable pool of clients in the immediate environment and thus ensure quick economic returns.

5. 0 Conclusion

The study has revealed that women in rural areas of Ekiti State, Nigeria were mostly illiterates and unemployed. They, like their men counterparts, are liable to diseases, lacked basic amenities especially pipe-borne water, modern medical facilities and motorable roads. The culture of the inhabitants of the rural area also made them to believe in spiritual attacks. When these factors result in the demise of women's spouses, the women were often suspected to be the remote cause of such deaths and the loss of the spouses change their social and economic roles. Thus the widows engaged in various survival or coping strategies which included remarriage and

levirate. The ugly treatments experienced by widows and their children now constitute positive incentive to realising the economic potentials of skills acquisition. A crucial aspect of actualising these potentials is the conception of the idea to acquire skills which is akin to entrepreneurship education. The widows constituted the primary source of the idea conception that elicited their children interests in skill acquisitions while the children themselves constituted secondary factor in making decision to actualise the conceived idea. The skills acquired by windows' children were gender specific with the male preference being technical and female being vocational skills. However, in both gender, the primary motivations for the acquired skills included the length of trainings (apprenticeship) and quickness of economic returns from the skills.

6.0 Recommendations

The study therefore recommends that skills acquisition by widows' children in the rural areas could be enhanced and sustained if the following suggestions could be considered:

1. Governments should evolve sustained regulations that would protect the interests of widows and their children as existing regulations have failed tremendously.
2. A new orientation should be evolved in the cultural belief of the people. Perhaps the traditional rulers should be further empowered to mediate on issues of inheritance with regards to widows and their children.
3. A department of widow's affairs should be set up in the Ministry of Women Affairs of each state. This department should be empowered to offer assistance, including legal assistance to widows.

4. The existing National Directorate of Employment should take up the responsibility of training and provision of equipment for the children of widows in the country.
5. Similarly, the nation's Bank of Industry should be empowered to make interest-friendly loan available for children of widows who have acquired skills so as to be able to set up small scale entrepreneurial outfits.
6. Religious and non-governmental organisations should be more involved in the drive for skill acquisitions.

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