

# **CROSS FAMILY RELATIONSHIP AMONGST DECEASED COUPLES IN AGULERI: IMPLICATIONS TO CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANS IN IGBO LAND**

Nganwuchu, Geoffrey Chiazio Ph.D  
Department of Religion and Cultural Studies  
University of Nigeria Nsukka  
geoffrey.nganwuchu@unn.edu.ng; geffchiazio@gmail.com  
08033103468

Obalum, Ignatius .C  
Institute of Theology  
Paul University, Awka  
08037466174

Kanu, Rex C., PhD  
Institute of Theology  
Paul University, Awka  
Rex.kanu@pauluniversityinstitute.edu.ng  
08036743583

## ***Abstract***

*The loss of a loved one, and the grief experience that accompanies it, is unique for every bereaved individual. Spousal death is one of the most traumatic events that can occur in marital experience and most times, engenders different reactions. This study explores cross family relationship amongst deceased couples in Aguleri and implications to Christian families in contemporary Igbo land. Widowhood practices in Igbo land especially among non-Christians involve traditional observations including drinking water of ordeal whereby the widow drinks the water with which the dead body was washed, other practices include keeping the widow crying for the dead husband and taking her to the stream to birth in the dead of night stark naked by a man. These practices violate the rights of the widow and make her vulnerable to diseases and physical abuse. The researchers employed both primary and secondary methods in data presentation. The work also employed Weberian Symbolic Interactionism for theoretical framework. Aguleri people of Anambra East Local Government practice Agiri whereby the widow chooses from among her husband's kindred who will marry her and discharge marital duties including sexual activities. The widow is not excluded from making alternative choice of male sex partner. The researchers x-rayed these practices and conclude by suggesting acceptable legal prohibitions and Christian practices favouring the widow and will not negate acceptable Christian cultures as practiced today in Igbo land.*

**Keywords:** Relationship, Deceased Couples, Igbo land, Aguleri, Nigeria,

## Christianity

### Introduction

Death of a loved one constitutes a major life event accompanied by different reactions. Grief following loss through death is a universal and normal human reaction which occurs within a socio-cultural context and entrenched patriarchy system in Nigeria generally, and particularly in Aguleri community. The death of a loved one usually has a tremendous impact on the lives of those left behind; it is often seen as an ultimate loss, which, invariably is accompanied by grief (Adeyemi and Shuaib, 2020).

Grief, according to MacNair Semands (2004), is the term used to describe the distress or suffering related to loss, particularly death. Grief is a complex experience that threatens people's emotional and mental well-being (Shonkoff, Jarman, & Kohlenberg, 1987), impedes their social functioning (Wilcox *et al.*, 2003), and compromises their physical health (Shahar, Schultz, Shahar & Wing, 2001). These impacts are particularly apparent in familial death, as surviving family members face emotional and logistical upheaval and struggle to communicate and connect, (Bosticco & Thompson, 2005; Shonkoff *et al.*, 1987). This presents challenges to the relationships among bereaved family members, who struggle to understand the grief of their relatives (Bosticco & Thompson, 2005; Sedney). Despite the relational implications of family death, challenges associated with studying bereavement have limited the capacity of past research, which has primarily centered the individual (Bosticco & Thompson, 2005; Keeley, 2017). Though valuable, these studies do not fully capture the inter-dependence of the family system.

This study examines the grieving process from a relational perspective, with the goal of understanding how the experience of one family member impacts the experience of another. The familial context can offset the severity of grieving challenges (Hope & Hodge, 2006; Wolchik, Ma, Tein, Sandler, & Ayers, 2008), and dependability and cohesion are two indicators of positive adjustment for bereaved families (Greeff & Human, 2004; Traylor *et al.*, 2003; Wolchik *et al.*, 2008). In addition, open and honest communication is a valuable tool in the coping process, helping to generate a mutual understanding of the death (Bosticco & Thompson, 2005). Indeed, it is through relationships that bereaved individuals make sense of loss, receive support for their grief, and adjust to a future without the deceased. This study explores cross family relationship amongst deceased couples in Aguleri and implications to Christian families in contemporary Igbo land.

### Significance of the Study

A review of the existing literature reveals that few studies have considered couplehood with a widow or widower from the perspective of the new partner. Furthermore, to the best of our

knowledge, no previous study has related specifically to the cross family relationship amongst deceased couples in Aguleri and implications to Christian families in contemporary Igboland. This study sought to expand our knowledge on the subject.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theories that deal with people and their interaction in the society are relevant for the background to this study. However, the theory of Symbolic Interactionism was adopted for this study. Symbolic interactionism is one of the major theoretical perspectives in sociology. This perspective has its beginning with the German sociologist and economist, Max Weber (1864-1920) and the American philosopher, George H. Mead (1863-1931), both of whom emphasized the subjective meaning of human behaviour, the social process, and pragmatism.

The central basic concept of symbolic interactionism is interaction, according to several of its proponents (e.g. Brittan, 1973; Glassner, 1980). Glassner (1980) points out that “interactions consist of at least the following: events, states, phenomena and processes. None of these can be reduced entirely to analysis of symbols’ ( p. 16). Interactions occur on a variety of levels and thus require an analysis in turns of both causal and meaningful understanding of actions and beliefs as it holds that the linkages among human activities are both meaningful and causal. Neither causal nor meaningful links are alone sufficient for an understanding of the process whereby activities came to have certain meanings (e.g. a payment being a tip), or people engage in certain actions (e.g. wearing a uniform), or people acquire a particular awareness of self (e.g. as ill), or people come to hold certain views (e.g. that death is appropriate). The linkages that exist in some particular situations must be understood at both levels and an integrated analysis produced. Another way to state the central claim of this paragraph is to say that symbolic interaction rejects idealist account of human action. It recognizes that people's processes of creating definitions of the situation, themselves and others exist in the world and cannot be grouped purely on the level of meaning. Once component of a symbolic interactionist analysis is an analysis of action in terms of meaning, symbolic interaction is concerned with how activities or beliefs are intelligible to or are to be understood by or what meaning they have for some specified group of people. Widowed persons fall within a specific social group and their response to events in life is definitely shaped by the meanings they construe, not just from their status as widows/widowers, but also from the associations they create from peoples' comments and actions towards them.

### **Grief Reactions of Bereaved Spouses**

The first descriptions of the grieving process suggest the existence of successive, essentially fixed stages such as disbelief and shock, yearning, angry protests, depressive mood and recovery or acceptance (Kubler-Ross, 1969; Parkes, 1970; Bowlby 1993 cited in Adeyemi and Shuaib, 2020).

In a similar opinion, Asonibare (1998) cited in Adeyemi and Shuaib (2020) posited that there are ten stages of grief people go through after the death of their loved ones; these are shock,

disbelief and denial, searching for emotional release, symptoms of physical distress, feelings of depression and gloom, a sense of guilt, anger and hostility, unwillingness to engage in normal chores, a gradual coming around and re-adjustment to reality. Nowadays, rather than speaking of specific successive stages, it is beginning to be accepted that although the symptoms of grief come and go, there is a gradual movement towards adaptation as time goes by (Hansson & Stroebe, 2007).

According to Hansson and Stroebe (2007), the four tasks of grieving are accepting the reality of loss; experiencing the pain of grief; adjusting to the environment without the deceased, and relocating the deceased emotionally and moving on. Normal bereavement involves reconciliation, which has been defined as "the process that occurs as the bereaved individual works to integrate the new reality of moving forward in life without the physical presence of the person who died" (Cohen, Mannarino, Greenberg, Padlo & Shipley, 2002). Although most people are able to cope with and navigate the normative grieving process without complications (Boelen, van den Hout & de Keijser, 2003; Bonanno, 2004), some are unable to do so successfully. When people are prevented from moving through the tasks adequately due to adjustment problems, the normal bereavement process is interrupted, grief reactions become much more painful and debilitating (Mayo Clinic, 2007), and complicated grief may develop. In fact, grief reactions may be severe enough to require psychiatric or medical treatment (Worden, 2003).

Complicated grief has been conceptualized as the development of trauma symptoms following a death that interferes with the ability to grieve (Cohen, Mannarino, Greenberg, Padlo & Shipley, 2002). People may experience trauma reminders, which remind them that death is traumatic; loss reminders, thoughts, memories or people that are reminders of the deceased; or change reminders, which remind the person of changes that have taken place as a result of the death. All of these lead to intrusive and distressing thoughts, memories and images about the trauma. According to the authors, these trauma-related thoughts then prompt the person to experience physiological reactions and extreme psychological distress similar to those experienced during the original loss. Grief reactions of bereaved spouses may vary and are influenced by numerous factors. A research finding by (Lisa, 2013) has shown that a number of factors combined in one way or the other influence nature of grieving in a spousal loss. These factors include nature of death, gender/ personality variables, age at bereavement, occupation, nature of the marital relationship, religion, gender, nature of the relationship, cultural factors, socio-economic status etc. Although grieving individuals experience a period of significant emotional distress after a loved one dies, usually the ability to engage in new interests, pleasurable activities, and healthy relationships will eventually return (Tomita & Kitamura, 2002). In some cases, however, grief reactions are more chronic and longstanding, resulting in clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other major areas of functioning. The death of a spouse has been found to be one of the most stressful events in an individual's life, and most related studies have shown that the majority of widows and widowers grieve the death of their spouses.

Similarly, a study by Falana (2013) on the influence of the length of marriage on grief experiences of widows in Yoruba land, Nigeria showed that respondents (old and young

widows) do not differ in their experiences of grief. Salomi (2014) who worked on psychological consequences of the early demise of spouses and the effect of the coping strategies on the health of the survivors in Ogun State, Nigeria identified that the psychological consequences arising from the early demise of spouses were instrumental for the throes and sorrows experienced by the surviving spouses.

### **Challenges of Deceased Couples**

Widows and widowers are the more affected group of people when it comes to the sin of omission especially in Nigeria. They are often forgotten even by their closest relatives immediately after the burial of their spouse (The World's Women 2000). Most Christian denominations do not have an existing structure or budget plan that covers the welfare of the widows floating the church. This has constantly been a wound in the hearts of these widows when departing the church premises to the cold shell of their homes to fight loneliness.

The question running through the minds of many widows and widowers is, if they will ever feel alive again after the death of their beloved companions? But surviving spouses from around the world bear witness that there is life after the death of a loved one and that a loving Father in Heaven will help provide the way to move forward. The Christian society is dual in nature covering both the spiritual and the physical gathering of the people of God. This dual nature of the church has been emphasized in the Bible. As a spiritual gathering, it is mainly concerned with salvation in the end-time sense, while its physical nature addresses itself to the here and now redemptive work of God as espoused in Luke 4:18. The concern of this study focuses on the later. Alela (2007) and Obwoye (2011) have not only demonstrated that social concern is part of the mission of the church but also that the church is strategically positioned to fulfill this noble mandate. They both report of dilapidating socio-economic situation of women.

The greatest challenge widows and widowers face after the death of a spouse is the challenge of moving on with their temporal lives. Some find it hard to make important decisions alone or to assume responsibilities formerly shouldered by a spouse. In addition, the financial situation of a widow or widower may be dire, especially if the spouse accrued medical bills as the result of a long illness, or if the widow or widower is left with no means to support the family. Widows remain amongst the most vulnerable members of society. It is estimated that the numbers of widows around the world to be in the region of 245 Million, of which 115 Million live in poverty. The well-being of a woman continues to be tied to her marital status whether she is single, divorced or widowed. The Christian widows are not left out of the above scenario. They face the same and even more challenges than widows outside the church, as church members are good at monitoring their steps than catering for their welfare.

People chose to maltreat widows instead of helping to ease their problems so that they live a better life (Agunwa, 2011). Widows rather than being sympathized with and assisted are subjected to near in-human treatment in certain traditional ritual rites and practices such as solitary confinement, defacement, dis-inheritance and a relatively long mourning period. The

most obvious effects are deepening poverty, acute stress and depression, loss of identity and self-esteem. Many men and women attempt to fill the void caused by their spouse's death by seeking out friendships or re-marrying. Some people become more involved with their work or their children or grandchildren. Others volunteer for religious and charitable organizations. Still others enter counselling or find comfort within a local support group (Vlassoff 1990). Because they are usually socialized to be emotionally expressive, women may have an easier time dealing with the emotional issues associated with widowhood than men, but they often have a harder time financially. They also have to contend with youth-oriented social stigmas that are tied to widowhood—the myths that widows are used up and old, making it harder for women to re-marry later, if they so choose. Widowers, on the other hand, are more likely to be depressed and attempt suicide than widows.

Most bereaved rely on their own personal resources as well as the support of others in their lives for the means to adapt and do not require more formal assistance. For those experiencing greater difficulty, however, interventions like support groups and 'one-on-one' programs can be effective, especially if accessed early in bereavement. While a small proportion of bereaved spouses in general participate in these programs, widowers as a rule are typically less receptive to them and often shy away from helping situations, at least at first. Consistent with their need to appear in control, especially regarding the display of their emotions, most widowers try to make it on their own even when they can benefit from outside help.

### **Couplehood after the Loss of a Spouse**

A review of the literature on couplehood following the death of a spouse indicates that loss is an integral part of the new romantic relationship and that this relationship does not replace the previous one but develops alongside it (Brimhall and Engblom-Deglmann, 2011). For most of the twentieth century scholars, ongoing ties to a deceased person were regarded as an indicator of pathological grief (Klass, 2006). This perspective was grounded in Freud's (1917/2009) “Mourning and Melancholia” in which he argued that successful adaptation to loss requires psychological separation from the deceased and relinquishing the bond with them to complete the grieving process. Klass *et al.* (2014) were the first to introduce the notion of the “continuing bonds paradigm”. (Florczak and Lockie, 2019), describe the connection with a deceased loved one as normal rather than pathological. This approach also informed examinations of the loss of a spouse (Lowe and McClement, 2011; Bokek-Cohen, 2014), which investigated the effect of continuing bonds on adaptation and coping with loss. Some found a positive effect. Thus, Lowe and McClement (2011) reported that widows' continuing bond with their deceased husbands strengthened them and helped them to maintain the continuity of their identity. Similarly, Bauer and Bonanno (2001) found that the ongoing connection played an important role in creating a sense of meaning and personal continuity after the loss. Other studies, however, reported a negative effect of continuing bonds on adaptation and coping (Klass, 2006; Root and Exline, 2014; Florczak and Lockie, 2019).

The complexity of the influence of a continuing bond also stands out in studies examining its effect on couplehood with a widow or widower. Several studies indicated that coping with a

partner's continuing bond with a deceased spouse is not an easy matter (Moss and Moss, 1996; Silverman and Klass, 1996; Grinwald and Shabat, 1997; Brimhall and Engblom-Deglmann, 2011; Bokek-Cohen, 2014). Kissman and Dane (2001) presented a case study of a widower who remarried a divorced woman and noted that the widower's ongoing connection to his late wife alongside the development of the new couplehood led to a triadic relationship that included the deceased woman, thereby interfering in the creation of the second relationship. The complex ramifications of this triadic relationship can also be seen in the study by Bokek-Cohen (2014), who examined the experience of young widows and their spouses. The new partners reported that their wives' continuing bond with their previous husband gave them the sense that she was married to two men. Although she loved them and was committed to them, she also continued to love and be committed to her deceased husband. Similarly, Moss and Moss (1981, 1996) examined couplehood after the loss of a spouse among older couples and found that the partner of the widow or widower was coping with the fear that their spouses' commitment to their first marriage came at the cost of their commitment to them.

### **Marriage and the Death of a Spouse in Aguleri and Implications to Christianity**

From time immemorial, one person does not get married to a woman. It is the entire family that marries the woman; such is the custom and tradition of Aguleri. Although the scope has been reduced in recent times, it still stands. Thus, rather than saying "Michael Idigo is marrying or married to Joy Ubaja" you say "Joy Ubaja is married to the Idigo family" and that is why a wife would often refer to any member of her husband's family as "my husband" – "di m" and they (the husband's family) would call her Our wife/My wife. Also other women married into the family bears the title "Nwunye di" (husbands-wife) because it is assumed that it is one husband that is marrying them all which is the family.

Having considered these, it is clear that in the days when this practice had full scope and full regard, one cannot treat the wife as he pleases. First, there is someone that would take you or escort you while going to marry that wife from your family members, as a witness. The very day and moment that the bride's parents would give the hand of their daughter to the groom; they won't give it directly to the groom but to the elderly person who escorted the groom. For the same reason, when there is wrong or trouble anywhere, the parent's-in-law will not rely on the reports of their daughter. They would rather listen to the witness whom they handed over their daughter who served as the witness during the traditional wedding. It is the traditional duty of the witness to ensure the good existence of the marriage. This can be likened to the practice of some religious sects in having facilitators and sponsors in marriage, the only difference being that, in religious practice; the witness, sponsor or facilitator needs not be a member of the immediate family. The implication being that, unlike in Christian marriage where it is "till death do us part" the death of one party in Igbo traditional marriage does not end the marriage per se. Even in the case of death of the woman, the husband still refers the family of his deceased wife as his in-laws. If the husband died, the woman still remains especially if the former marriage was blessed with children. A member of the deceased husband's family still marries her to keep the memories of the late husband alive. At the death

of the husband, particularly the marriage goes on. If the woman is still young at the time of her husband's demise, it is the responsibility of the family to take care of her financially, physically and emotionally. Therefore, the practice of wife inheritance still subsists among the Aguleri people. Ilogu (2008) refers the practice as “ikuchinwanyi”. The woman may keep on having children for the family though depending on the agreement with the new husband. Christian understanding of the practice of widow inheritance is quite obscene. The reference is adultery but Igbo tradition especially in Aguleri upholds that idea because in Igbo traditional cosmology, death of husband does not obliterate the elongation of the deceased interest in the family, as the dead man has become an ancestor (Arinze, 1970). The Old Testament idea of levirate marriage here applies as there are traditional rites and rituals that bind the new couples. In Nnewi town, the practice of giving of knife by the woman and reception of the knife by a male member of the deceased family signifies tying of conjugal knot. Basden (1942) captured such event in Awka.

However, there is a dark side to this practice which is that most of the times and almost all the times the woman or the wife of the deceased man has no choice as to the man that will take up the previous responsibility of her late husband. This is because the Igbo traditional marriage is hinged on the belief that the family would always think of what is best for the wife. But no matter how good and positive a person's mind is, thinking for another or on behalf of another person does not always go well, in practice. No one can just sit and assume what is best for another, except a mother doing for her foetus. Also, as it is a common knowledge that as there are good members, there are also bad members of a family. When there are a rather big number of bad eggs or negative minded people in the family, this concept or practice is often abused. Part of this abuse is the total disinheriting of the woman and thus making certain that there is not a single property of her late husband that is hers. To such extent that if the husband had four or five farmlands, it reverts to the Umunna. This happens mostly in cases where the woman has become quite old and nobody is interested in “Ikuchi” to cover the woman probably because there is no child or the children are still little and minors to the Umunna. Most times after such disinheritance and confiscation of property, the woman and possibly her children would find it difficult to provide for themselves. On the other hand, the woman and children may resort to their “Ikwunne” that is their maternal family where in the Igbo traditional conception; they can never be refused anything unless such demand, want or need is not there. The crux of this is that marriage with a woman is by the family and this often gives the family the space to decide what happens in a marriage depending on how resistant or indifferent the husband is. A strong-willed resistant husband, nobody utters negative words to his marriage while he is still alive. Now, when the husband dies, the wife is subjected to rigorous mourning and burial rites and rituals. These rites and rituals are often diabolic and inhumane. These are the few in Aguleri; First, at the death of a husband, until after three whole weeks the wife of the deceased man would not bath nor allow water touch her bare skin. She won't wash her hands after using them to eat, at least not in public. And because it is believed that the god of mourning is always watching, these rituals and activities will not be done in secret. The woman won't sit on a chair rather she is to sit on the bare floor and she can't leave her house or be seen outside, she will remain indoors for twelve days which in Igbo cosmology is tantamount to three weeks (count the four markets days as one week). Then, on



the twelfth day, in the morning, the most elderly of the first daughters in the family would take the woman down to a river to take her bath for the first time after twelve days. Before she takes her bath, her hair would be cut and shaved to bald, often this barb or shaving is done so wickedly that one would question the motive.

The reason for these aforementioned is that in Igbo concept of husband's death, the wife is the first accused. The belief is that the wife murdered her husband and thus she starts defense from day one after her husband's death. A woman widowed and mourning her husband's death now buried under tons of gossip and accusations, it is often a trying period for the woman in those days and to some extent up till now. It is funny, in the way sad things are funny because the co-wives and daughters married elsewhere who join hands in accusing this woman of murdering her husband forget that when their own husbands die someday, they will meet the same fate.

Of course, unlike in Christian marriage, the Igbo marriage is not necessarily based on love and that's why these things happen to a woman after her husband's death. The Igbo traditional marriage especially here in Aguleri is based on the hope that the woman would be of great help to the man and his family or that marrying from a wealthy family would be useful or for the selfish purpose of strengthening the parent's friendship regardless of how the young man and woman feel about the marriage. So, there is always a selfish angle to Igbo marriage. Most times then, if the woman and man marry without loving each other or even knowing anything about each other, it often results to crisis and often the parents don't proffer good solutions. Although amidst this crisis, quite a few would go to the extent of killing their husbands but it is not all of them. This is where the concept of the wife being the first accused in the case of her husband's death originated from in the Igbo cosmology.

Furthermore, after the woman has fully undergone these rites, rituals, mourning and burial of her husbands, the next thing that follows is the concept of "NkuchiNwanyi". The woman or wife of the deceased man would often be left in a dilemma. To agree or not to agree but often, she has no choice partly because the family decides and partly for the sake of her children and herself to avoid more suffering, which involves the possible disinheritance and confiscation of her late husband's property and in situations where the wife has no male child, she could be chased out from her husband's house and thrown to the streets with her daughters. But if she agrees to the "Nkuchi" practice that is; getting married to another man provided by the family, then she gets another protector. One important thing to note in the Igbo traditional marriage especially here in Aguleri is that the relationship between in-laws in a marriage is not strained or ended by death of a spouse or party. Marriage continues even after the husband dies. In most cases, it continues until all the people aware of the marriage dies which is most unlikely to happen since parents tell the tales of family bond to their children and them to their own children and thus it goes forever.

Eventually, after the wife takes her bath for the first time after twelve days, the family provides her with a mourning cloth which is often a black material or fabric. She would wear that same cloth for a stipulated period of time. Before, it was one year in Aguleri but now it is six months. After the six months of mourning, she would be asked to burn that cloth and her

hair would be shaved again and for the first time after the first shave when the husband died. When these are done, the wife/woman can return to living her life normal.

Moreover, there are a few supposed good reasons why these traditional practices are carried out on the wife after the husband's death. For instance, beliefs that two things can repel spirits or ghosts and they are water and sand. Also, they believe that a dead man's spirit only moves on after twelve days. It is because of this that the wife has no business with water or the outside world until after twelve days with hopes that if the wife is innocent, the husband's spirit will not harm her but if she is not, then she would be punished by the spirit. Of course, within those twelve days, discussions on “NkuchiNwanyi” will not take place because she is still on a special mourning period. The black cloth signifies sorrow and that is why she is made to wear it for six months while mourning. Even though these days, the church prefers white to black with the belief that a dead Christian has resurrected with Christ.

On how these affect the Christians, it is common knowledge that the church believes that once a person dies the spirit goes to God, there is no need for the twelve days theory. The one angle where the Igbo tradition agrees with that of the church is in marriage and death of a party to marriage is that when a person dies the family should mourn. However, the church purports that one should mourn as a person with hope of a good condition for the dead family member and not as one without hope just like in Igbo traditions. The hopelessness of the Igbo traditional mourning rites is why there is the Nkuchi practice. An avenue to give false hope to the wife and family. But in the church, the Christian mourning rites does not take away hope. It gives the wife great assurance that life continues even after the husband's death. There is no mention of Nkuchi practice or 'its' likeness in the Christian doctrines. Again, in Christian marriage practices, the death of the husband actually ends the marriage and vice versa. If the wife wishes, after she feels that she has mourned enough she could get married again and vice versa. She is equally allowed by the Christian faith to remain in the family if she does not wish to re-marry. This is not the case with the Igbo traditional system, even where there is no male in the family to take up her late husband's role, the woman is allowed to have male friends who would make her pregnant and thus she could bear children for the family, this is very much obtainable in the Aguleri traditions. This is where it clashes with the Christian faith because both adultery and prostitution, whichever way it is looked at, does not agree with Christianity. But in Igbo traditions, it is not viewed as a wrongful act.

Also, the seeming wickedness in form of mourning rites and rituals metted out to the wife after her husband's death contradicts practices and doctrines of the Christian faith or the Church. The maltreatment of widows on grounds of mere accusations of murdering their husbands is barbaric and totally inhuman. It is worthy of note that there is no custom or tradition stipulated for a man should he lose his wife to death. Unlike in cases of widow, a widower can bury the dead wife as he sees fit. He can choose to shave his hair or not. He would mourn and wear black cloth while doing so. Nothing holds him back from gathering or joining his friends at a beer parlor, chatting, drinking and laughing, even in front of his compound while mourning. He is even allowed to look at other women because it is expected of him to re-marry soon. In fact, after sometime after the wife's burial, if the man makes no

move towards re-marriage, the family begins to trouble him to do so, except if his children are all grown up and he is at that moment old. While mourning, within the twenty-eight days, women of the family would be coming to help do some chores for the man, to cook, wash and clean for him. But after the twenty-eight days, everybody goes their separate ways. It is at this period that the man is compelled to re-marry since by traditions, the Aguleri man is not to enter the kitchen at all for the purpose of cooking. If deliberately considered, one may suggest that from how the widow is treated and how the widower is treated on the other hand, that the Igbo traditional system maltreated the woman severely. But from the point of view of our fathers then, they met out these treatments owing to the fact that those days men were the bread-winners. As farmers, hunters or otherwise, they could not sit indoors for twelve days and do nothing because no one would provide for them as they provide for the widows those period and their children would suffer. The Igbo concept of living made it so that you can't hold a man for so long, otherwise things might go astray. It is not the same level of pity and sympathy that is shown to widow that would be shown to a widower in terms of gifts. Thus, the concept of after death practices in Igbo tradition is pure but because it is implemented by human beings, there is involvement of various forms of abuses. The wickedness picked up from these practices is as a result of the abuses not the concept itself. In the six months of general mourning period, the widow is not allowed to belong to any man emotionally or sexually. The Igbo tradition forbids it. However, those hoping to be the ones to take over by reason of "Nkuchi Practice" may be generous enough in bringing her gifts but cannot touch her. Of course, within the twelve days of special mourning, no man attempts getting close to the widow as it is believed that the man's spirit is still around and thus would smite anyone who attempts such. Once the spirit has been sent off after the twelve days, the man and the widow could do as they please in secret but it is an abomination and there are dire consequences traditionally and they must be resolved. Although in some places in Igbo land, they would bath the corpse of a man and force the wife to drink the libation water in order to prove her innocence. The Aguleri tradition does not do such. It allows the man to fight his own battles since within the twelve days, his spirit still moves about. He could smite the woman if she caused his death or not if she is innocent.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are necessary for reform in cultural practices:

1. The state's law on widowhood by Enugu state should be enforced in other states of the Federation of Nigeria to protect and enforce widow's rights.
2. There should be a review of the Customary Laws in Nigeria to remove the clauses that do not protect the widows and reform all areas that is in respect of widows.
3. Legal actions should be taken against those who defiantly ignore or violate widows' rights.
4. Religious creeds and practices that do not favour or protect widow's right should be changed or abolished.
5. Massive enlightenment should be carried out to educate widows on their human and legal rights especially in the rural communities and equally educate the Umuada and

Umunna on the need to treat their fellow women and wives with respect and dignity.

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