

**WIDOWHOOD PRACTICE IN EZEAGU, NIGERIA: THE ROLE  
OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH**

by

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## **Dedication**

This research project is dedicated to the Almighty God who gave me the ability and strength to complete both the course work, as well as the research component towards my Master of Theology degree.

## **Acknowledgement**

I am grateful to the Almighty God for the enablement granted to me throughout the duration of my studies. God's empowerment throughout my studies is a buttress to the Biblical message, "It's neither by power nor by might, but by my Spirit, says the Lord" (Zech. 4:6).

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I am equally deeply indebted to my dear husband, Mr. J U Oyi for his spiritual and financial encouragement, his patience and all the precious hours sacrificed.

## **Declaration**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this mini-thesis is my own original work and has not been previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any institution for a degree.

**Signed:** *Agubuzu-Oyi Celestina Mgboo*

## Abstract

The mini-thesis explores the socio-cultural practice of widowhood in Ezeagu, Nigeria. The study found through both the literature study and the empirical component, that harmful cultural practices are associated with the cultural rituals of widowhood. These rituals are deeply rooted in hegemonic theory, a type of moral and philosophical leadership, which promotes dominance and control at the expense of the oppressed and marginalised. Hegemonic practice in Nigeria - as it relates to widowhood practices - rests with major social, political and religious groups who provide consent to cultural practices. Furthermore, the study found hegemonic theory undermines the human dignity and rights of widows and their children in the research locale and has added to the stress (life crisis units) and hardships of widowhood.

The study proceeds to reflect on the role of Scripture and consequently the church in addressing these harmful widowhood practices as well as charting a path to assist widows in ordering their personal worlds. The people of God in the Old Testament (the Kehal Yahweh) and the Church in the New Testament (the Ecclesia), the study argues, has always been at the forefront of addressing issues related to social justice. Drawing on the Biblical narrative and secondary sources the researcher highlights the social responsibility of the [Anglican] Church.

The Anglican Church the study also found has been very active in alleviating the plight of widows in Ezeagu. Through its pastoral and caring activities, the church assisted several of its members as well as citizens attached to other religions to find accommodation; assisted in supplying food; through its advocacy programmes addressed issues relating to legislation, education and creative strategies, in their attempt to eradicate the harmful practices relating to the nature, rituals, and damaging practices of widowhood.

The study concludes by making recommendations on how widows, the church and society at large can continue to upgrade and intensify their efforts to empower especially Anglican widows, who are members of the church, to order their private world and become mentors and/or coaches of those who enter the status of widowhood and serve as advocates for the plight of widows in Ezeagu. The study

appeals to the spiritual senses of the Anglican Church deeply rooted in the biblical narrative to continue to seek the welfare of widows as an expression of biblical advocacy and action in relation to human hardships. Solitary religion is not an option for the church. In keeping with one of the central biblical passages for the church at large, Matthew 22:34-40, [social] holiness is deep intentional love for neighbour. Stressing religion, evangelical spirituality or social action, one without the other the study argues leads to problems in both directions (Evangelical Gnosticism), and keeping the balance is the task of the church, this is, theology in action.

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# Chapter One: Introduction and Context

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## 1.1 Background of the Study

Pastoral Theology has been defined as reflection on the caring activity of God and human communities (Lartey 2006). Therefore, pastoral theology must concern itself with wider concerns i.e. economic, political, cultural, social, and religious apprehensions. The researcher has been involved in studying Pastoral theology-ministry for the better part of three years, in her attempt to develop an approach to the ministerial task more specifically relating to the caring activities of the church. This approach to ministry would not only help her to share the message of salvation and of the gospel, but would also enable her to understand and interpret human existence pastorally and contextually. To this end, the researcher endeavours to interpret and analyse widowhood practices in Nigeria, Ezeagu, the Local Government Area of Enugu. Adjustable strategies have been described as an individual's or an organisations coping behaviours or strategies, which are deliberately used by widows or organisations to handle, control or alleviate the effects of stressful situations.

Statistical records in Ezeagu have revealed broad categories of adjustment strategies acknowledged by Ezeagu widows. The majority of 59% reported experiencing stress at medium level, 29.85% and 10.35% confirmed experiencing stress at low and high levels respectively. Ezeagu widows seemingly differ significantly in their stress levels and adjustment strategies due to personal variables. It was recommended among other things that relatives, society, governments and counsellors should mount intervention strategies like the abolition of injurious widowhood practices, legislation against oppressive mourning and widowhood rites and establish a National Commission for widow's affairs. The study also recommended that counsellors should provide rehabilitation and recovery counselling. This should include re-orienting the widows' cognition about their state of being and its attendant stress. The rehabilitation and recovery counselling advocated should focus at restoring total personal well-being of widows and the

maximization of their potential for optimal integration into the larger society (Oniye 2000, Abolarin 1997, Lieberman and Sherman 1989, and Olusakin 1998).

The statistical records, observations and commentary in the reports prove insightful to the researcher vis-a-vis the pastoral task and caring activities of the church cannot ignore the sociological and anthropological findings albeit from a different paradigm to theological studies. As a thinking practitioner and having completed several courses in pastoral care and counselling the researcher is familiar with basic theories relating to the role existential knowledge and scientific studies play in strategising around issues involving pastoral care. The researcher has worked with widows in Ezeagu and the realities amongst widows listed above have been experienced first-hand in her pastoral task.

During this time, the researcher started to reimagine ministry to widows in the demarcated research locale by [re]thinking the role of the church universal and in particular, her denomination's responsibility in ministering holistically to affected widows. The researcher's ministerial experience calls for real understanding in her pursuit of assessing, the current status of widowhood practices in the research setting and the activities of her denomination. The researcher cannot merely assume the difficulties and realities of widows. In her attempt to redirect or enhance the pastoral action of her denomination to a holistic theological vision, which includes rounded ministry to widows the researcher decided to explore more fully widowhood practices and the actions of her denomination in the region where she serves.

## **1.2 Preliminary Literature Review**

The preliminary literature review provided here serves to ensure that the research is current and contextual, and that it has validity in the academic community (Haines, Goddard and van den Berg 2009:7). Furthermore, it assists the researcher to survey the most recent and relevant literature pertaining directly to the research topic. This section offers no analysis. The section merely communicates the researcher's knowledge of theoretical approaches and specific works, which could also have a bearing on the research.

Scholars who have achieved both a high degree of spirituality and intellectual attainments are in agreement concerning the many issues relating to widowhood. Previous research findings revealed that a number of factors combined in one way or the other to influence the use and benefit derivable from various adjustment strategies. According to Oniye (2000:9) some of these factors are: the present income; living conditions; perceived health, status and presence of a confidant. He saw stress in the context of adjustment strategies manifested by a widow or an individual, because of a perceived inability to cope with demands of living or other life situations following the death of a spouse. Lieberman and Sherman (1989:20) add that positive change only occurred among the widows who had participated actively in the programmes of self-help groups.

A good identification with others is another strategy often used by widows. Abolarin (1997) explained the need and the implications of neglecting a widow in a community. He contends that an adjustment strategy is crucial because a widow without proper adjustment or assistance is not only experiencing problems, but could be a problem to herself, her family and local government. Wiebe (1987:32) contends that the problems encountered by widows include the fact that recent social and economic changes, as well as urban family systems, have increased the widow's loneliness and outlook on life.

Olusakin (1998) asserts widows are not well treated by society compared to widowers especially in Ezeagu. Moreover, Schneider, Sledge, Shuster and Zisook (1996) on the other hand argue that there is greater expression of psychological well-being manifested by widowers and widows who remarry. Stroebe (1987:49) is of the opinion that the factors, which are likely to influence a widows' adjustment to bereavement stress, include: the age of the widow, her religious inclination and socio-economic status. Wiebe (1987) affirms that the death of a spouse and its consequences are not the same for males and females. Previous research has revealed the various ways that could help both the church and the counsellors to come to their own theological understanding of the issues relating to widows and to formulate their approaches to the management of the plight of widows.

Recent research on the adjustment strategies of Nigerian widows sent for rehabilitation counselling after the death of their loved ones revealed deep-seated grief. In Ezeagu, widowhood is particularly stressful because the services offered to widows are pitiful. Consequently, changes in their living conditions reveals widows are worse off emotionally after the observance of the mandatory mourning period and the widowhood practices that accompany it (Oniye 2000). Ozoagu (1993) maintains in some towns a widow is forced to undergo some serious observations, especially when it was agreed that a widow is responsible for her husband's death. Abdulsalam (1995) noted that after the burial of her husband a widow is forced to go through the mandatory mourning practices and widowhood rites. Later on she has to choose between being remarried outside her in-law family or allowing herself to be inherited by a member of the husband's family.

Widowhood is also associated with the expression of anger, which is even more intense than the anger experienced by a divorcee (Kitson 1987). In the views of Thomas and Shechan (1988), intense grief and anger are more common among women in widowhood because of denial following the loss of a close spouse through death. Widowhood, it is also reasoned, is the greatest source of psychosocial deprivation for children of female-headed families (Ambert 1986).

### **1.3 The Research Problem**

Although many authors in Ezeagu have addressed a wide range of issues concerning the plight of widows over a long period, none of them has directly addressed the role of the Anglican Church in dealing with its members who are negatively affected by widowhood. This is the identified research gap, which this research addressed. The uniqueness of the study investigates the role of the Anglican Church, exploring how they assist their widows in dealing with the relevant stress and other practical factors.

## **1.4 Research questions**

According to Smith (2005:16), a research problem consists of a main problem, which serves as the primary research question or the research objective and a series of secondary questions or objectives.

### **1.4.1 Primary Research Question**

How can the Anglican Church in Nigeria better understand the experiences of widowhood and provide a theological-strategic-practical response that will demonstrate greater intensity as it relates to the caring activities of God as revealed in the Bible?

### **1.4.2 Secondary Questions**

- What are the experiences of Ezeagu widows on the ground relating to harmful widowhood practices?
- What do Scripture and Christianity teach regarding widowhood?
- How should the Anglican Church respond in a more proactive manner to harmful widowhood practices in the demarcated area?

The secondary questions will be accounted for in a nested manner because of the multi-layered nature of the realities of widowhood. In other words, the literature reviewed is not wholly separated from the empirical data and vice versa. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with bullet 1 above. Bullet 2 is accounted for in chapters 1, 3 and 4. Chapter 5 provides specific recommendations based on the empirical and reviewed data for bullet 3 above but chapters 1, 3 and 4 also provide insightful.

## **1.5 Delimitation of the Study**

Several factors play a role in delimiting the study. Geographically the study is limited to the geographical area of Ezeagu, which forms part of the Enugu State in Nigeria. Located in South-Eastern Nigeria. Nigeria is divided into 36 states (or provinces). These states are further divided into Local Government Areas (LGAs).

The study is also delimited in terms of church denomination, namely the role of the Anglican Church. The study focuses mainly on the experiences of widows and the

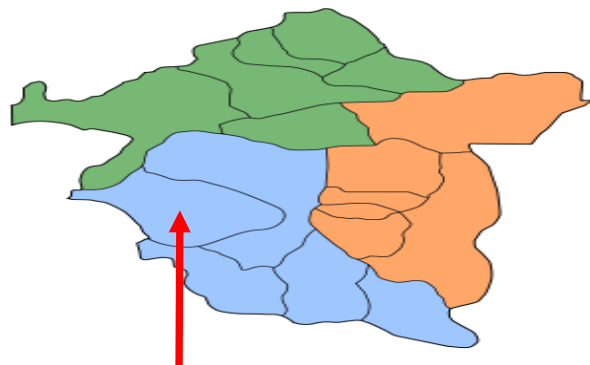
role of the Anglican Church in the demarcated area. This is done in order to keep the study at a manageable and cost-effective size considering the intricacies of the research sample, sample technique, data gathering and collection procedure and the [subjective] interpretive approach to the research.

### Map of Enugu State



<b>State:</b> Enugu
<b>Population:</b> Around 3 000 000
<b>Rank:</b> 22 <sup>nd</sup> largest state (out of 36)

### Map of Ezeagu



<b>LGA:</b> Ezeagu
<b>Population:</b> 170 000
<b>Archdeaconry:</b> 9 churches

Source: <http://www.citypopulation.de/php/nigeria-admin.php?adm2id=NGA014006>

## 1.6 The Value of the Study

This Study will:

- Hopefully, introduce sound evangelical thinking and tools that could positively influence the extent of widowhood practice in the research area.
- Give society and the churches an opportunity to examine and refine their theological and practical standpoints on the plight of widows.
- Provide information and access to a range of evangelically sound and well-researched recovery programmes on the plight of widows, which are potentially valuable tools in the ministry of the church.
- Encourage believers to become involved in a ministry that plays a vital role in helping widows overcome their situation.

## **1.7. The Research Design**

### **1.7.1 The Research Paradigm:**

Pastoral theology is viewed as a sub-discipline of practical theology. It is understood as a form of practical theology. More specifically pastoral theology has to do with the mutual relationship between theology and pastoral work by providing a framework for pastoral ministry. Pastoral theology according to Douglas (1998 in Lessing 2011:3) concentrates on the interface between theology and pastoral experience.

“Pastoral theologies by its very nature arise from its particular contexts. The social, economic and cultural contexts influence to a large extent what is available, relevant and necessary for pastoral theology” (Lartey 2006:42). American theologian Farley (2003:7) asserts that pastoral theology involves in essence, interpretive thinking acts. Farley (ibid) further contends that interpretive acts reflect the careful attention paid to the contexts in which they work. In terms of this study the contextual analysis is geographical, Ezeagu a Local Government Area of Enugu, Nigeria. Furthermore, it concerns itself with widowhood practices, adjustment strategies and the role of the Anglican Church.

The research methodology chosen for this particular study, having reviewed the most recognizable models in practical theology, is loosely the Theology in Action Model. The steps involved in conducting such a study include social (used broadly) analysis, theological reflection and church-pastoral planning.

African spiritualo: ontology and practical philosophy occurs through a communal and holistic view of life. The various aspects of human social and spiritual life are basically connected and interpenetrative. Interpenetration is a description that upholds a view of mutually accomplishing something. This is similar to a dialectical approach. In philosophy a dialectic approach is where two forces are brought together to discover truth (Thesaurus online). The research in question endeavours to do that, bringing together the subjective experiences of widowhood practices, adjustment strategies and the role of the Anglican Church in the demarcated area



and the perceptible-distinguishable Biblical text and supporting literature to discover truth.

The methodical paradigm is interpretive. The social aspect of the research is thus viewed from an integrated perspective. There is a focus on social consciousness. In this respect and more particularly, widowhood practices and adjustment strategies are viewed from an Anglican perspective but more importantly from a Biblical (normative) perspective. The study anticipates calling for structural relationships to be revisited and a transcendence of current limitations. The study has strong nuances of description and prescription.

### **1.7.2 Research Organisation**

The research starts with a basic description of what led to the study. **Chapter 1** outlines the background of the study, the research problem, the hypothesis, describes the research aims and objectives, explains briefly the scope of the research, the theoretical framework, a preliminary literature review is conducted, a summary of the methodology outlining the research design and research methods employed, and lastly the research ethics, which guided the research are briefly stated. **Chapter 2** is the methodology chapter and it builds on the summary remarks in Chapter 1 of the mini-thesis. **Chapter 3** is the literature study that was conducted to review the causes, reactions, and treatment of widows; reactions of widows to their status, problems associated with, effects of, and the symbolic interaction associated with widowhood. **Chapter 4** is the presentation of the empirical data. In this chapter the findings of the data are not only presented but it is discussed and analysed. **Chapter 5** sees a very brief summary of the context of the research, the research problem, and the research aims and objectives followed by a critical discussion and recommendations as the study concludes.

### **1.7.3 Research Methodology**

The research methods build on the research paradigm (see 1.8.1). Practical-pastoral theology centres around faith inspired care and care inspired faith (Lartey 2006:28). The conceptual framework embraces this approach to the mini thesis as it deals with the adjustment strategies and the role of the Anglican Church in caring for widows.

The sources of practical-pastoral theology in this study are scripture, experience, context, and the human sciences. Firstly, the Bible is viewed as the 'revelation of God.' The approach according to Pattison (1993:120-121) is not an uncritical one or a 'tokenist' method.

Due weight is thus assigned to the Bible as the Word of God and in addition the use of exegetical and hermeneutical principles are employed and attuned to sound academic approaches. The Bible thus functions as an authoritative source but not as an exclusive or private discussion partner. The use of Scripture is to inspire reflection, attitudes, and compassionate actions consistent with evangelical tenets.

Secondly, pastoral encounters or experiences with widowhood as in this study will also serve as a source for pastoral theology. This could be described as a contextual approach to theology or a theology from below. The starting point is thus not the Biblical text but the realities of widows in the research locale who serve as co-researchers. Reflective and caring listening forms part of the study as the co-researchers are to be the beneficiaries of the research project.

Thirdly, context as a social location influences knowledge largely. Therefore, context as a representative of the social and psychological conditioning of an individual affects the interpretation of reality. As the researcher, I am aware of my pre-understanding as well as those of the interlocutors.

Fourthly, in order to address the last mentioned source and limitation, the study makes use of research methods from the human sciences, more specifically action research with the help of qualitative research methods to overcome the limitations the social locale presence. Since the study, forms part of what can be considered a community study and aspects of social ethics and tools employed by the human sciences are deemed useful. The study recognizes the differences in the assumptions and presuppositions of the human sciences as a dialogue partner. (cf. Lartey 2006:37-41). The study thus anticipates an appropriate balance; however,

the Bible as the normative guide is used as an instrument to sensitize a particular issue.

#### **1.7.4 Research Ethics**

The research ethics policy as outlined by the South African Theological Seminary (2008) will be used as a guideline in conducting the empirical component of the research. The following principles will influence the thesis:

- Respect for human dignity
- Respect free and informed consent
- Respect for vulnerable persons
- Respect for privacy and confidentiality
- Respect for justice and inclusiveness
- Respect for national and international Law

(South African Theological Ethics Policy 2010:6).

Due consideration needs to be given to the ethics criteria of the research. Given the structure of the research policy at the seminary and attention to detail relating to the guidelines above in terms of the research process; the researcher sought full research clearance. The researcher completed a proforma ethics clearance form and submitted it to the research ethics committee. The research ethics committee granted full ethics clearance.

### **1.8 Conclusion**

This chapter provides a road map for the mini-thesis. The chapter furthermore highlights the required sections in order to cover the essential aspects to successfully complete the envisaged research. Due attention was given to the various sections to set out the research in a balanced manner and logical manner. In the next chapter the researcher communicates, the methods (tools) employed in the research in greater detail.

## Chapter Two: Methodology

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### 2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented an overview of what Scripture and modern day literature teach on the [Christian's] faith community's responsibility regarding widows. Both primary and secondary data were sourced to view how the church's provision of a theological response would raise awareness and abolish harmful widowhood practices while forming proper adjustable strategies that would alleviate the felt needs of widows. In chapter, one the researcher revealed that she considered the various practical theology research models and the model, which most closely represents her approach, is the Theology in Action (TIA) model, although it must be understood that the current research is not an exact application of the TIA model.

The TIA model has three main components representing the three main chapters; normally chapter's two to four. The TIA model consists of (1) social analysis (2) theological reflection and (3) pastoral planning in addition to the introduction and conclusion chapters. Chapter two of this thesis covers both points 1 and 2 above. Chapter four and five have some elements of points 1-3 above.

The methodology chapter is not catered for in the TIA model as per its normal descriptions and usages. The researcher had to make a decision, either providing a longer methodology section in chapter one or to include a methodology chapter (3), which this chapter is. The researcher decided that in chapter one she will mainly provide the philosophical aspect as it relates to the research design and that she will include a research chapter by outlining the research methods or tools used in gathering, presenting and analysing the data. Such an approach was deemed most natural to the research in question. The researcher therefore concedes that the practical theology research models are not a one-size fits all approach, rather, it allows the researcher to make decisions in relation to the nature of the research and at the same time try and avoid superficial treatment of the main components.

## **2.2 Methodology**

### **2.1.1 The Literature Component**

The study firstly made use of a descriptive literature review to enable the researcher to describe the cause, experience and the harmful widowhood practices in Ezeagu (see chapter three). The chapter also defined and explained hegemonic theory and issues related to prestige and power in Africa, Nigeria and Ezeagu. The literature also included a Biblical survey and commentary on the role of Scripture and the church as a faith community. The literature chapter then considers social service and action, and how it relates to compassionate caring ministry. The chapter comes to a close as the literature consulted argues that injustice anywhere ought to be challenged and that several options for the church are there for the taking as it reflects and acts on legislation, education and creative strategies.

The literature review, which is a combination of social analysis and theological reflection, is by no means exhaustive. The chapter is also not an exegetical chapter; rather, the theological reflections in chapter two are reviewed to establish the foundational guidelines of the Bible on the research topic. What the Biblical section reveals is that the church, which is made up of Christians individually and collectively, is to take responsibility for providing and protecting widows from harm. These passages are both narrative accounts, which serve as a pattern for doing good and direct commands to do well to others.

The literature study was composed of both academic and popular works. These consisted of books, articles, journals, commentaries and reports. Popular sources were used, as the researcher views the material as relevant to a wider audience, which included the research participants. In other words, apart from the personal experiences of the widows and a selected few widowers, church officials and the general public; the documents summarised the general knowledge of the research participants on the subject in the village. Church documents were also reviewed in order to inform the study. The researcher also made use of nearby institutional libraries, online databases for example EbscoHost, interaction with the assigned supervisor, other academics and fellow students as resource partners.

### **2.1.2 The Empirical Component**

Information was sourced from the church and the general public who served as discussion partners, in addition, questionnaires and interviews were used to explore the real life situation of the Ezeagu widows. The researcher sought to describe the historical perspectives of the many challenges these widows are facing, outline the strategic adjustment and the possible suggestions that would minimise the harmful widowhood practices in the Ezeagu Community of Enugu State.

The interviews and focussed group discussions were unstructured as the participants were generally uneducated and took the form of life histories. This interview type is referred to as in-depth interviews (Dawson 2002:27). The researcher used the local dialect of the widows to conduct the interviews and focussed group discussions. Secondly, ministers, paid staff and lay ministers from the Anglican Church were interviewed. Those not in a position to present themselves for interviews were sourced to complete questionnaires.

The interview/focus group and questionnaire contained a section relating to the personal particulars of the respondents, their religion, their understanding of and experiences relating to harmful widowhood practices and lastly their employment status, skills set and income. The data was double-checked to ensure its reliability and validity concerning the essential information revealed by the respondents.

The chosen tools were used in gathering the relevant information as it promised to secure the required data involving minimum time and expense. It also allowed for wide coverage, and allowed greater consistency in the way in which questions were posed and followed up on and to enhance the collection of responses from the above selected groups so as to obtain the exact information required for the purpose of the study.

As noted earlier, the study was situated within a broad practical theology framework and more specifically within the field of pastoral theology as reflective action of practical divinity in relation to caring activities.

## **2.3 Sampling Technique and Selection of Participants**

Random sampling was chosen in the demarcated area. In addition to the geographical cluster, the Anglican Directory was consulted and a few churches were selected in different locations in Ezeagu. The respondents were also selected, regardless of age, gender, and tribe nor in proportion to the demographics of the total congregants, ministers, lay-ministers or paid staff in the Anglican Church. The venue of the study was St. Andrews Anglican Church Olo, Ezeagu, Enugu State. Ten participants (widows and widowers) from each of the churches were selected for the present study. In addition, informal discussions with some widows from the village and the church revealed the identity of the village to analyse their understanding of the harmful widowhood practice and how adjustable strategies could be used as deliverables in the transformative task of the Anglican Church as a servant of the community.

## **2.4 The Analysis and Interpretation of Data**

The empirical data collected through interview schedules, focus group discussions, the questionnaire, archival documents and general conversations was analysed, tabulated consistently and uniformly. A computer-aided software facility was used to analyse the variance after the interviews, and the themes and concepts were integrated to formulate a theory. This is the identified research gap, which the researcher addressed. The uniqueness of the study investigates the role of the Anglican Church in the research locale exploring how they assist and could possibly better assist widows in dealing with the relevant stressors and practical factors. A data analysis commentator was used before the final write up of the analysis.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

Chapter two, sketches how the research tools were employed in the study. The research methodology shows that the Theology in Action (TIA) was used as the preferred research model with slight modifications. The next chapter is a descriptive literature review. In the next chapter, the researcher engages books, articles, and relevant sources to frame the research in conversation with appropriate sources.

## Chapter Three: Descriptive Literature Review

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### 3.1 Introduction

According to Potash (1986:1) women make up almost half of the population of almost any given society. He reveals very little is done concerning their welfare even though there are feminist movements cropping up almost everywhere. A historical approach to widowhood studies in Nigeria suggests that there are no clearly defined records that inform the reader on this topic. Afigbo (1986:8) believes no systematic, sociological and cosmological studies have been conducted. This has resulted in scarce information on the subject. The chapter in question therefore cannot take a pure literary or analytical approach (cf. White 1987:58). Instead, this chapter takes on a descriptive literature based approach.

The aim of descriptive writing is to give information and to describe something, or an event or experience. A literature review or scholarship review normally entails not only reading and summarizing current scholarship; it also analyses and evaluates the arguments of others. There will thus be a form of argumentative writing. The purpose of this chapter is therefore twofold. Firstly, to review the state of scholarship on the topic of widowhood generally in Africa and specifically in Ezeagu, Nigeria. Secondly, to provide a meaningful description of the current status of widowhood.

### 3.2 The Cause of Widowhood

Widowhood is caused by the death of a spouse. Attitudes toward death, dying, and bereavement differ, but the inevitability is always that everyone will die unless the Lord hastens His return (Heb.9:237). "To everything there is a season. And a time for every matter under heaven: A time to be born and a time to die" (Eccl. 3:2a). This verse communicates two basic truths about human existence: human life results in the birth of an individual, with the certainty of death. Death has been the interest of philosophers and theologians for centuries, but it has only been in recent years that psychologists, counsellors and behavioural scientists have given scholarly attention to the subject.



Ancient concepts surrounding death, like that of the Greeks gave rise to *thanatology*, the study of death. This is most evident in the great thinkers of Egypt, Greece, and Rome (van der Spy 2004:54-55). Judeo-Christian concept of death is that it is part of reality and comes about as a consequence of original and personal sin. Nevertheless, death in itself is a multi-faceted reality (Doss 1972).

Death is very hard on anybody. However, the disorganization and the subsequent traumatic situation of the widows in Ezeagu seem to be more severe on women than on men. The impact of death on a widow runs deep socially, psychologically and economically. Agunwa (1999:4) states that tradition and some cultural practices prescribe harsh injunctions for widows, who are at times denied the basic essentials of life.

### **3. 3 The Widowhood Experience**

The study took into consideration the submission of Abolarin (19978 in Oniye 2002) that cultural influence is a major determinant of a widow's hardship and stressful condition. It has also been noted that socio-cultural factors do influence a widow's opportunities and challenges, especially in a multi-cultural society like Ezeagu where a widow is not allowed to participate in social functions. The study has also highlighted the observation by Gbenda (1997 in Oniye 2002:10) that a widow's personality (factors like her marital and parental ethnic background) are of predominant importance. This confirms the findings of Wiebe (1987) McGloshen and O'Byurant (1988) in Oniye (200:10). Widows are ill-treated and their support structures are largely dependent on their personality traits, socio-economic status and socio-cultural opportunities, of which the latter is very limited.

African society is characterized by unstable traditional and cultural practices, as a result of external influences and variables. Certain customary practices have survived this transition. Agunwa (1999:5) asserts that current widowhood practises are among the practices, which did not undergo transition. They go through harsh and difficult challenges of bereavement, for example, they have to demonstrate phases of yearning, searching, and disorganization and of re-organization (Woof and

Carter 1994:44). Akujobi (2006:7) asserts that survival is not easy for many widows who experience life as a continuous struggle to make ends meet, support their children, uphold religion/tradition, and avoid illness and death. There is no real support mechanism in place to ease their burden.

There is also the emotional and psychological nurturing of children that rests with the widow who has to guide her children through the unnatural experience of single parenthood, as children are unable to form the necessary parental attachments. Sampson and Laub (1993:269) assert that the consequences of the diminishing opportunity for adequate parental attachments where both parents are neither alive nor living together results in a lack of discipline and children end up being delinquents. Aichhorn (1925:79) agrees that the experience of an absent parent is enormous. It may cause children to struggle with their identities. This often results in children committing crime, as a compensatory means of obtaining desires and needs, which are not provided by the family (Jones 200:33).

Grieving is about separation and accepting the finality of death (Jennings 1988:166). A widow is always occupied with the vision of the images of her deceased husband (or wife in the case of a widower) while they are still grieving. Their reaction to grief is intensified when they are reminded of the deceased and have to demonstrate a sense of loss that meets the standards of religious and cultural practices. When the widow reacts to the loss with an initial sense of well-being (within a set timeframe, which is unspecified) and shows a positive personality change, she is met with hostility or irritability. In some cases, she is even suspected of causing the death of her spouse. To this end, Kunhiyop (2008:261) she may be asked to drink the unhygienic water used to wash the corpse of her husband to demonstrate that she is innocent.

She may be asked to perform a cleansing ritual by bathing naked before the funeral crows during the funeral ceremony. There is also the possibility of having sexual intercourse with a relative to prevent the departed spirit of her husband from coming back to seek sexual union with her.

A widow who is married into a family upon the death of her husband is regarded as a visitor or an outsider because she is not a biological member of the family she is married into. At her husband's funeral, she might be relegated to be a mere spectator. She could also be forced to immediately return all her husband's property and personal belongings. In some extreme cases, even the house will be taken and she will be driven away (Kunhiyop 2008:61). "The cause of this is a cultural setting that invariably promotes alienation, male domination, and female subordination" (Ahonsi 2000:2).

As it relates to certain towns in Ezeagu, it was observed that some of the customs and tradition relegate women to the background and clearly deprive them of their rights and privileges. For example, whether or not a widow remarries is a question to be decided by her in-laws. This will affect the sociological and economic situation of her and the children. The decision as to whom she marries must carry benefits for the original in-laws and extended families. If she refuses, she will have no right to her in-laws (Aswald 1987:145).

Other researchers have attempted to outline the stages of mourning during bereavement more systematically and coherently. Bowlby (1960:9) identified five distinct stages as follows: a) concentration directed towards the deceased, b) anger or hostility towards the deceased or others, c) appeal to others for support and help, d) despair, withdrawal and general disorganization, and e) reorganization and the redirection of the self towards a new love object. Kavanaugh (1974:17) suggests that there are seven states involved in the grieving process viz: a) shock, b) disorganization, c) violent emotion, d) guilt, e) loss, f) loneliness, e) relief, and f) re-establishment.

In view of the above, this study considers and weighs appropriate or relevant factors within Nigeria, which had or has direct and indirect influences on the widows and their children. It will further seek to interpret the relevant pronouncement of such outcome and their implications for the past, recent and future work of the church in these communities.

### **3. 4 Hegemonic Theory and Prestige Power**

Hegemonic theory has its roots in 1920s and 1930s. According to Bocock (1986:11) hegemony means “moral and philosophical leadership or control,” which is attained through the active consent of major groups in a society. Hegemonic theory in Nigeria has come to mean an overtly state-centered approach that deals with sociological (broadly used) issues, but cannot adequately explain widow-community relationships.

On the other hand, the gaining of prestige power could be seen as an attempt by a person to generate esteem, respect, and sometimes awe among others (Holsti, 1995:107). Traditionally, the only credible symbol of power has been military might, until recently, when issues such as human rights, adherence to the rule of law, democratization, sports, science and technology, and arts and culture, began to constitute elements of prestige power.

Hegemonic and prestige power are interrelated but misconstrued among specialists in every society. For instance, Althusser (in Bocock, 1986) viewed hegemonic power strictly as the application of force strictly to compel both educated and uneducated to abide by the rules, norms and policies of hegemonic condition (Aron 1973:135). Other scholars view such power as the use of force and material resources to control the peasantry as a homogeneous category with respect to its structure and stratification in terms of norms as cultural values. There are two types of cultural norms which guide human behaviour: Norms are everyday matters of politeness and norms have great moral significance.

The social, economic, political-conflict paradigm envisions culture as a dynamic arena of inequality and conflict. Culture can constrain social possibilities; yet as cultural creatures, we have the capacity to shape and reshape our world to meet our needs and pursue our dreams. Some cultural patterns benefit some people more than others.

Drawing on Kunhiyop (2008:259) he argues that cultural patterns in Africa reveal that widows and children have always been the most vulnerable and helpless group. He

continues by arguing that their vulnerability is increasing given the number of ethnic conflicts, epidemics like HIV/AIDS, natural disasters, illiteracy and the breakdown of positive traditional ways of caring for them. He further maintains many orphans and widows “endure unimaginable emotional turmoil, deprivation, sorrow, anguish, and abuse at the hands of their relatives and society” (ibid). This is a result of cultural patterns, a lack of political will and religious inactivity in this arena.

### **3. 5 The Role of Scripture**

The Christian Church or certain segments in the Church have often been criticized for preaching a social gospel. This is not what the writer has in mind. Scripture rightly interpreted should generate a social consciousness that reveals the heart of God. In light of the scriptures, the Church should provide an alternative to the social reality widows in Ezeagu face. Any Christian, church denomination or Christian organization should apply the principle of holistic mission because high view of Biblical evangelism, pastoral care and social action should go together.

When one studies the life and teaching of Jesus, one is exposed to the example of the indivisibility of love and justice. “What love desires, justice demands” (Stott 2006:32).

The biblical call to justice in the Old Testament grew out of a legal context. Donovan-Turner (2004:78-79) notes that the word for justice, ‘mishpat’ (μισεπατ) was often connected with the idea of protecting the rights of the weak and helpless. Here lies a strong word of grace and mercy. In addition, the word righteousness on the other hand carries a more dynamic meaning than simply meaning being in right standing with God. The word more forcefully means it is well with my neighbour and me. The righteous, therefore, served God and the most vulnerable peoples of the world at the same time.

The Bible has quite a lot to say in terms of how widows and orphans should be treated by the faith community. A brief look at the Biblical texts highlighted by the recently published Social Justice Bible testifies to this. It must be noted that the mini-thesis focuses on widowhood in the main.

Firstly, God is the defender of the widows and orphans (Deut. 10:18). This highlights the notion that it is God who preserves and protects the marginalized, namely, the fatherless, the widow and that he loves the foreigner. In the Old Testament God ushered in laws, see Lev. 19:9-10 and Deut. 24:19-21 that will allow for the survival of those on the sidelines (Kunhiyop 2008:263). Kunhiyop (ibid) continues by stating that we, as God's redeemed community, must follow His (God's) example. Therefore, a form of partisan justice or preferential treatment (scholars differ on this notion e.g. Sider 2007, Stott 2006 and Chilton 2008) must be promoted, for those who through various factors are marginalized. Perhaps this would be best described as Christians seek to be compassionate and wisdom workers by focusing on the needs of the poor and wasted places.

Secondly, God punishes those who mistreat widows and orphans. Donovan-Turner (2004:71) relates the story of how she was reading a text (from Isaiah, the exact text is not specified) where God was rallying against the community because they have not regarded the plight of the widow and the poor during a sermon from the Prophets class. God was angry. The words were graphic, illustrated and intense. God's anger was hotly burning; it was the smoking anger of God that was highlighted in the text! Then almost out of nowhere a student asked, "What type of God is that?" After a long period of awkward silence another student answered, "Perhaps we should ask the widow and the orphans." Exodus 22:22-24 speaks of how, if anybody abuses the widows, those who are married will have their own wives widowed (Kunhiyop 2004:263). The text highlights that if they (the widows and orphans) in their distress cry out to God, He will hear them and punish the transgressors.

Thirdly, godliness involves taking care of the widows and the orphans. This point is stressed throughout the whole Bible in both the Old and New Testament. Job 31:28 connects ill-treatment of widows and orphans with 'sins to be judged and it also relates to being 'unfaithful to God on high'. God vows in the text that the 'eyes of the widow' will never grow weary. God on the contrary will provide for her, the fatherless, and all those who grew weary. In the New Testament, the Bible reminds us of pure religion and pure Christianity. James 1:27 states that religion which God

accepts and which glorifies and pleases Him, is that of a redeemed community who looks after orphans and widows in their distress. The church is therefore expected to rise above secular standards (cf. Kunhiyop 2004:263-264). Matt. 25:40 explains that if we have done this to the least of these we have done it to Him. The context of the parable indicates that the least of these are the vulnerable and needy. The hungry, the orphans, widows, those incarcerated, and the naked etc; will demand moral courage (Bouwers in Kretzschmar et al 2009:193).

### **3.6 The Role of the Church**

The study will not allow the writer to conduct a brief religious analysis. The study will restrict itself to the role of the church in general and that of the Anglican Church in particular. The Pastoral Church Council (PCC) records of 1904 have traced widowhood practice in Ezeagu to be in existence before the coming of the first Catholic Missionary Society, (CMS) catechist Henry Townsend to Badagry Lagos Nigeria, in 1842. Moreover, the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ believes that all of humankind are created not only equal but are made in the image of God (Gen 1:26) and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. The transformative agenda of the Church must be to serve as a vanguard in protecting and providing moral and material support for widows and orphans. The Church must also stand with the widow when claims are made that the widow must surrender the belongings and property of her husband. Kunhiyop (2008:266) believes the Church has a role to play during the immediate crises and beyond and find some means of helping the widow. These bold and drastic interventions must be taken in order for the Church to truly live out its God given mandate.

Pastoral care serves as a response to the need of someone in trouble. Clinebell (1984:41-42) sees counselling as an outgrowth of pastoral care. The role of the Church in terms of counselling according to him is both an in-reaching and outreaching activity. Kunhiyop (2008:266) relates a story of a seminary student who was married with four children, who suddenly passed away and how the relatives soon arrived to take the belongings of their son only to be stopped by a pastor.

As God's instrument, the Church is a structure and tool in the hands of God in mobilizing and sensitizing the community to abolish any tradition that is harmful and does not permit the love of Christ. Galatians 6:2 says, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." The Church of Jesus has a responsibility to minister to those who are vulnerable as indicated above both in and outside the Church. Carl Rogers who completed his doctorate in psychology argued in his book in 1952 that the client should be put in the centre of counselling and emotional therapy (Greve 1994:48). This is consistent with the Christian worldview. However, Christian counselling and pastoral care has as its ultimate goal the salvation and spiritual growth of an individual.

Clinebell (1984:38-40) describes the four standard strands of counselling as:

- Healing - the focus here is to restore a troubled person to wholeness and to lead individuals to advance beyond hurt, confusion and fear;
- Sustaining – helping a person to endure and transcend a circumstance;
- Guiding – assisting perplexed persons to make confident choices between alternative choices and
- Reconciling – by seeking to re-establish broken relationships between fellow man and between man and God.

These four strands are unique but they also overlap. According to my understanding of the four strands the key is that, the focus is on the positive outcome, the solutions, and the preferable future. Ultimately, pastoral care and counselling is dependent on God's grace, and to see His grace at work. This implies utilizing spiritual resources.

As indicated in this section, the Church as God's institution and as an organism has historically been at the forefront of responding to people in difficult situations. The Christian Church offers hope, stands for justice and righteousness. The Church should protect the weak and helpless. The Church must therefore keep its eyes, ears, and hearts sensitive to the needs of those on the margins (Donovan-Turner 2004:79). In the past the above assertion has been linked with liberation theologies. Today, at least the circles in which the writer operates do not for one-minute dispute the social responsibility of the Church. The Church's social responsibility must result in fruit that reflects the integrity and holistic nature of the gospel.



### 3.7 How Should the Church Respond Based on the Advice of Scripture

#### 2.7.1 Social Service and Social Action

According to Stott, (2006:35) social action goes beyond social service. Whereas social service deals with issues surrounding relieving human need, philanthropic activity, seeks to minister to individuals and families and perform works of mercy. Social action builds on and expands on the work done in social service by removing the causes of human need. Involvement in terms of political, social and economic activity, seeks to transform structures in society and demonstrate a quest for justice, righteousness, grace and mercy. The table below will illustrate the point more clearly.

**Figure 1: Social Service and Social Action**

<b>Social Service</b>	<b>Social Action</b>
Relieving human need	Removing the causes of human need
Philanthropic activity	Political involvement
Seeking to minister to individuals and families	Social and economic activity
Performing works of mercy.	Seeks to transform structures in society and demonstrate a quest for justice, righteousness, grace, and mercy.

(Adapted from Stott 2006:35)

As pointed out above, authentic Christian concern should embrace social service and social action. Stott (2006:36) is of the view that to divorce them would be artificial. Ultimately, Christians are to work towards eradicating and removing the causes of human needs and the promotion of a just, responsible, and peaceful society.

### **3.7.2 Challenging the Status Quo**

Bouwers (in Kretzschmar et al 2009:193) maintains that after analysing and evaluating the situation and formulating a just recourse the next thing to do is to challenge the existing structures where injustice prevails. If the Church in general remains silent, it will be complicit in acts of injustice, abdicating its responsibility to hold those in positions of power responsible for exploiting the vulnerable and helpless.

Bouwers (in Kretzschmar et al p.164) continues to explain that the most basic manner in which the Church can get involved in assisting the orphan and widow is by taking responsibility at a local church and perhaps denominational level - Church based initiative shelters, support groups, home based care, and food parcels etc. Encouraging volunteers to get involved in a real and practical way that will alleviate pain and suffering.

Where possible join hands with civil society and government to take action on issues where there is a common interest to do good. Each local church and denomination must at a micro-level determine and ascertain the most pressing need in their vicinity.

### **3.7.3 More Options**

According to Kunhiyop (2208:290), our approach must be three-pronged. The three prongs consist of legislation, education, and proclamation. We will look at each one of these in a little more detail.

#### **3.7.3.1 Legislation**

Government can make laws that serve the common good of humankind. Although one could argue morality cannot be legislated, it can create a supporting environment where unhealthy, unnatural and harmful cultural practices are outlawed. Government must be urged (and I will go as far as saying pressurized) to create and improve economic and social conditions that will affirm the dignity and respect with which vulnerable people must be treated. The poor and voiceless should not be pushed through government neglect into harsh and unpleasant realities (Kunhiyop 2008:290). Neglecting orphans and widows is much more than just a legal matter it

goes against the values promoted in Scripture as well as the African value system. As Christians and the Church seek to engage government regarding the legal framework of some unpleasant widowhood practices, it should do so from a biblical basis. Cultural practices that are consistent with the biblical value system must be entertained as well. This does not mean Christianity as a religion should be embraced; people should be free to choose the religion of their choice.

### **3.7.3.2 Education**

Kunhiyop (2008:264) believes the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ must be concerned and participate in educating communities at large (in Africa) about how widows and orphans should be considered and handled. Facilitating community education must serve as a means to promote spiritual and social development. The way the Church in general can go about educating communities regarding the plight of widows educationally is through non-formal education. This means holding classes, seminars, workshops, and various forms of training practicums to promote compassionate ministries. Later on in this thesis I will reflect on Bible based compassionate ministries. The point here is that these non-formal educational activities challenge communities at large to take responsibility for its widows (empowering them to practice Christian compassion); at the same time they communicate self-help strategies to widows.

### **3.7.3.3 Creative Strategies**

If the Church wishes to live out its mandate it must look at ways to provide moral and material support to orphans and widows (Kunhiyop 2008:266). Wealth creation for widows is very difficult given their vulnerable state (Galadima 2010:25). Nazarene Compassionate Ministries Canada, for example set up a Save our Village (SOS) structure in Bangladesh where widows are provided with a house, food and basic materials and part of her duties are to take in 3-5 orphans. The orphans and disadvantaged children in turn are also then afforded the opportunity to get an education, food and health care. Agmission activities are then implemented. Agmission is using agriculture and minimum technology (where applicable) to teach orphans and widows to improve their lives. As financial aid at some point drops off, assisting them to 'fish for themselves', is the establishment of a functioning economic

system. In addition to the above, the church provides the spiritual nourishment in terms of evangelism, discipleship, and pastoral care undertakings.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This chapter provided a descriptive of literature on the status of scholarship as well as the current practices and experiences regarding widowhood in Africa in general and Ezeagu in particular. The chapter reviewed the cause and experiences of widows, two concepts namely, the hegemonic theory, and prestige power were explored. The chapter then surmised the role of scripture and by implication the role of the Church. The last section reflected on how the Church could respond in terms of legislation, education, and creative strategies. This chapter serves as the backdrop against which the empirical research component was conducted. The next chapter serves as the heart of the research as the researcher presents and analyses the findings of the study.

## Chapter Four: Data Presentation

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### 4.1 Introduction

Having shown the steps taken during the research process the current chapter is concerned with the presentation, as well as the analysis of empirical data. The data was documented in the form of simple tables and discussions. Analysis was carried out with respect to various aspects under study, and in some instances, data is analysed separately yet connectedly (see 4.9-4.12 below where no tabulations appear). In addition, some aspects of the data findings are clearer in chapter 5 when the researcher makes certain recommendations. Conventional percentage and average analysis were applied as a form of data interpretation. The results were refined, categorised and organised in the light of empirical data (Dawson 2002:122).

### 4.2 The Research Participants

The data below reveals the number and the status of the research participants. The research focuses mainly on widows who are experiencing stressful situations. Nonetheless, a few widowers also formed part of the sampling to compare and contrast their experiences with that of widows and to hear their views on their own experiences and how their religious community has treated them. In addition, the study also focusses on the Anglican Church in Ezeagu, therefore, 5 clergy members were interviewed to gain insight into their views on the cultural practices of widowhood, the status of the widows and how the church is currently responding to their plight, as well as, how the church sees its role in the future.

**Table 1: Research Participants**

	Status	No of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Widow	35	77.77
2.	Widower	5	11.11
3.	Clergy	5	11.11
4	Total	45	100.00

### 4.3 Religious Orientation of Respondents

This section highlights the religious affiliation of the respondents. In the main thirty respondents was Christian including clergy from the Anglican Church. Twenty five percent of the respondents were not from the Christian tradition as indicated below. The data reveals that those belonging to the Christian religion are the predominant religious group, followed by the other religious categories. The data does not reveal whether the Christian respondents are born again believers, who have a personal relationship with God. Establishing the aforementioned is not really the focus of the study. The information gathered merely indicates that the respondents are [somewhat] religious and are mainly Christian, which serves the purpose of the study, which focuses on the caring activities of the Anglican Church.

**Table 2: Religious Orientation of Respondents**

	Religious Affiliation	No of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Christian	30	75.00
2.	African Traditional	5	12.50
3.	Islam	5	12.50
4.	Total	40	100.00

#### 4.4 Age Group of Respondents

The data shows that a good number of widows/widowers are fairly young and are between the ages of 25-45. The highest number belongs to the age group 46 and above. The figures are interesting especially in light of Paul's instructions to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:9-16. He points out certain qualifications a widow (not widowers) must meet in order to warrant financial support from the church. How consistent is this with the rest of the Biblical witness? The data suggests that in the reality of life widows/widowers are as young as 25 years of age.

**Table 3: Age Group of Respondents**

	Age group	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.	20-45	10	25.00
2.	46 and above	30	75.00
3.	Total	40	100.00

#### 4.5 Level of Education

The study discovered more than half (52.50) of the respondents were illiterate. In addition, a fair number (too few still at 42.50) completed secondary school and a small percentage (5.00) had a college certificate or degree. The table shows respondents are likely to experience serious hardships because of their illiteracy, which minimises their chances of finding decent jobs. Their age, as pointed out above, would also be a disadvantage as companies and organisations generally favour younger and less experienced workers.

**Table 4: Level of Education**

	Educational Status	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Illiterate	21	52.50
2.	Secondary School	17	42.50
3.	College/University	2	5.00
4.	Total	40	100.00

#### 4.6 Employment Status

The tabulation below indicates more than two-thirds of the widows are currently unemployed. This is a very high number and indicates that these widows/widowers are dependent on social welfare and relief programs to survive.

**Table 5: Employment Status**

Number of Respondents	Working	Not working	Percentage
13	√	-	27.02
27		√	72.98
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>		

#### 4.7 Dependents

Most of the widows/widowers have children who are dependent on them. Most of the dependent children are young - either teenagers or young/adults who are in school



or pursuing higher education at university or college. Generally, the financial need is fairly serious. The children who are independent are only starting out in the working world, have debts to pay (student loans and debt associated with ‘wanting to make a living’) and are not living affluent lives. In case of the latter, they not really in positions to take care of their parents financially.

**Table 6: Dependents**

	Status of Children	Number	Percentage
1.	Independent Children	17	28.82
2.	Dependent Children	42	71.18
3.	Total	59	100.00

#### **4.8 Help Received**

The widows received help from various institutions within the Anglican Church but mainly from local congregations. The respondents are based at municipal or government institutions, namely, low cost housing units, old age homes and shelters for destitute persons (people in crisis). The old age homes are established social institutions. Low cost housing units and shelters for the people in crisis (safe houses) form part of government’s social housing programs. There are requirements attached to these establishments in terms of access to their facilities. Outlining these is beyond the scope of the study.

Some of the institutions mentioned below are also partners of the Anglican Church in their effort to assist widows. As the table below shows, help has been received from a community-based institution, namely, the Widowed Support Group in Nigeria. There was also the Self Help Program, aimed at empowering the widows (and a few widowers) to deal with their loss, customs and new status as well as being single

parents. The research also found that 17 of the respondents received assistance from Muslim Women. What makes it interesting is that many of the respondents who are mainly Anglican (Christian by Religious Affiliation) are open to receive help from other religions in their plight to survive. The National Council of Women Societies, Neighbours, Relatives and Friends also gave some sort of support in the form of relief efforts.

**Table 7: Assistance Efforts**

	Name of Organisation or Society	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Widowed Group of Nigeria (WGN)	26/40	65.00
2.	Program of Self-Help	31/40	77.50
3.	Widows Organization International (WOI)	12/40	30.00
4.	Federation of Muslim Women of Nigeria	9/40	22.50
5.	National Council of Women Societies (NCWS)	17/40	42.50
6.	Neighbours/Relations/Friends	17/40	42.50

#### 4.9 Widowhood Rituals

In addition to what was mentioned in chapter 3 (see 3.3 and 3.4 above). The study's observation upheld the customary humiliating and almost inhumane difficulties, which the Ezeagu widows are currently subjected to during widowhood rites. In Ezeagu, the ritual for the widow is called "Igba-Nkpe." The respondents explained differences in detail and materials involved in widowhood rituals revealing a big difference between the burial rights of a common husband and the Chief or the Ozo

(titleholders). The traditional rights are categorized and performed according to the status of the deceased. The Chief and the Ozo are the rulers in the community and are wealthier than the common person is. Their rituals are higher with more burial rights than the common person.

It is difficult to give the detailed practices as narrated by the respondents who were based in different locations. Nonetheless, some common elements are the mourning period, which takes between one week and one year with specific activities recommended for each period. At the announcement of the death of a woman's husband she will wear the "mud cloth" (OgodoUpa) for between seven days and one year depending on the community. It is believed that if she survives these rites then she is free from the guilt of causing her husband's death.

Respondents revealed that a widow is put in a cage where she could sit on a mat without sleeping for the first two days of mourning, and she is expected to wear black clothes for seven months. As stated above the rituals differ somewhat from place to place but essentially, they cover the same ground. According to the respondents, in another archdeaconry, when a husband dies his wife or wives are expected to express their sorrow through crying and to go into confinement for seven days during which they are expected not to change their clothes. In yet another archdeaconry a widow should not weave her hair. Her hair must be worn short. In the two other archdeaconries woman would be expected to shave or scrape her hair as a sign of severing bonds between her and her late husband. During the mourning period, which can last between forty days and four months, the widow is expected to wear a pensive look and be clad in black attire to some selected public places.

What is more, during the initial seven days of mourning the widow is expected to sit on a bare floor, cooking and eating with broken pots. The common rites for all the widows from the different locations revealed the final rites, which include

- (a) being washed;
- (b) a change of clothes (dresses) at night, after having the final wailing session and
- (c) the outing early the following morning.

She is led to the market to perform, a ritual before the market starts in order to put the spirit of the departed to final rest. At the end of all the rituals, a widow can now decide whether to be inherited by her husband's relative or to remarry an outsider.

#### **4.10 Property and Widow Disinheritance**

It was revealed by the widow respondents that at the death of their husbands, they were expected to surrender all their husbands' properties to the relatives for adoption. They would be expected to take an oath that they had not concealed anything from the family members. In some cases, a widow would be accused of masterminding the husband's death even where it was very apparent that he died of natural causes or an accidental death.

In spite of the above, the property of the dead man passes to his siblings rather than to his wife and children. Neither widow nor children are shown respect. Occasionally children are left orphaned. Often the widow and children are ejected from those properties. These rites are enforced to suppress them and deter them from ever laying claim to their husband's properties. Among the towns, the respondents revealed that a barren widow has no rights to her late husband's properties and the widowhood rites may not be rightly observed.

Sossou (2002) states, most widows who are of child-bearing age prefer to remain unmarried to enable them to stay in the family in order to have some basic provisional needs met in order to take care of their children.

#### **4.11 Social Discrimination**

In one archdeaconry they did not allow a widow publicly to participate in social functions, for example, the village's annual New Yam Festival and the Ofala Festival until seven months after the death of their husbands. This is because they are still in their widowhood clothes, which they wear based on the assigned period. Throughout the period of mourning, widows are not permitted to come out and participate in any social outings. They effectively must keep to themselves. This could be likened to solitary confinement in prison. This discrimination is refusing them their God given

human dignity based on the creation account which promotes fellowship with fellow human beings and the material world (Stott 2006:199).

Widowhood is also associated with intense grief and the expression of anger brought about not only by the loss of the husband but due to the aforementioned social discriminatory practices. Thomas and Shechan (1988:39) write, intense grief and anger are more common among women in widowhood because of discrimination, following the loss of their spouse through death.

The extremely poor economic conditions of a widow's low income without any form of increase adds to her growing poverty, preventing her from providing her children (where children are still dependent on their mother) with the basic necessities of life like education, health, food, clothes etc.

## **4.12 The Anglican Church**

### **4.12.1 Housing**

The clergy who participated in the study revealed that the Anglican Church currently does not have the physical infrastructure to house widows and their children apart from a few local churches that have some small scale social housing project available. However, they are generally informed of the status of widows and widowers and where practical try to assist them by finding them accommodation and providing for their immediate need. They claim the assistance of the Anglican Church has restored the widows' dignity, relieved them of distress, created a healthy environment, helped them to gain access to health facilities, developed their positive outlook on life and enabled them to become productive citizens. Some of the respondents confirmed this.

### **4.12.2 Financial Muscle**

The church is experiencing financial challenges in this regard and this limits their ability to take care of the widows and widowers in a more meaningful and significant manner. The financial recession experienced in the 2008-2009 'global recession' has set the church back in its intentions to support widows more purposefully. However, as tabulated above (table 7) the Anglican Church explained that in many instances

they collaborate with likeminded organisations in assisting particular Anglican members who are experiencing hardships in their widowhood. They also mentioned that in certain cases (table 2) individuals from other faiths benefitted from their services or initiatives and vice versa (table 7).

#### **4.12.3 Pastoral Caring Practice**

Without minimising the social aspect and with limited financial resources the church has been very active in promoting spiritual maturity through discipleship programs (fellowship, Bible Study and counselling programs) whilst helping them deal with their pain. They also attempt to create or cultivate a spiritual atmosphere for the widows by helping them enter into a richer experience of worship and a more effective life of service in the church and in civil society. This supports the view that one of the most importantly consequences of Christianity is the formation of an ultimate value, meaning and direction to life., (Wiema (1988:41) Nonetheless, the pastoral care of the Anglican Church has assisted in minimising the effects of some traditional beliefs that contributed to the poverty of the widows. The Ezeagu Community has experienced a transition from harmful traditional order to more humane modern social order and thus a more integrated development of weaker sections of the society.

The clergy (who served as counsellors) identified the loneliness experienced by widows as problem area, but through rehabilitation counselling, focused on restoring their total well-being and the maximisation of their potential for optimal integration into the larger society. This has been a big challenge in the Ezeagu Community.

#### **4.12.4 Social Responsibility**

The majority of the widows accepted their condition as their fate, as though they were destined to live in such conditions because of illiteracy, lack of awareness and poverty related matters, which are tied to widowhood. The Church as a servant community has created awareness through workshops and seminars in the Ezeagu community, by pointing to the important role that people, as ordinary citizens need to play in society. One such awareness program has been educating widows by promoting economic development initiatives to bring about their independence and to live in communal harmony.

The Anglican Church in Ezeagu is totally committed to the cause of freedom and respect for widows in Ezeagu it was reported, not simply for their sake, but because they are convinced that human freedom is a sacred right that must be attained. The faithfulness of God is demonstrated by the church in offering hope, standing for justice and righteousness. This is the same as the act of God demonstrated to humankind through Christ who went about doing good.

#### **4.13 Conclusion**

Chapter four presents the data findings and analysis of the field work. The data confirmed that the widows experienced harmful widowhood practices derived from cultural norms. However, the data also found that the family and the community at large do not uphold the caring activities, which are closely imbedded in African culture, for example the fact that widows and children in Africa belong to the community and not only to particular families. The chapter further describes and comments on widow rituals, disinheritance of property, social discrimination and outlines the role of the Anglican Church. The next chapter ends the study through a summary of the research, recommendations and overall concluding remarks.

## Chapter Five: Summary, Recommendations and Conclusions

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### 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the data findings of the study. Chapter 5 serves as the concluding chapter of the study. The chapter has three main components. Firstly, the chapter briefly summarises the main findings of the research. Secondly, recommendations are put forward to continue, upgrade and intensify the role and responsibility of the Church as it relates specifically to issues common to the harmful widowhood practices in Ezeagu. Thirdly, general conclusions are made regarding the study.

### 5.2 Summary

The study explored the experiences of widows in Ezeagu. The study showed by exploring primary and secondary data that the widows in the research locale undergo some harmful widowhood traditions, which are enforced through hegemonic cultural practices. The study revisited the Biblical mandate and the role of the Church in assisting the most vulnerable people in our societies. In Acts 4:32 we read that the early church held everything in common. The NET study notes, states, “the remark is not a reflection of political philosophy (*like Marxism or Socialism, italics mine*), but of the extent of their spontaneous commitment to one another. Such a response does not have the function of a command, but is reflective of an attitude that Luke commends as evidence of their identification with one another.” Although such identification entails some sort of financial implication it is much more and goes much deeper than relief efforts. This is well documented in historical theology where the Church, naturally, serves as a catalyst for social transformation.

In addition, the study discovered that the Anglican Church has been very active in assisting the widows through various intervention and self-help programs. These interventions are also in partnership with government programs. The study also revealed that in the one instance several respondents received and participated in help offered from the Islam faith community in their effort to survive the hardships of life they experience as widows.



## **5.2 Recommendations**

### **5.2. 1 Fundraising and Sponsorship**

The study revealed there are financial challenges, which are negatively affecting the work of the Anglican Church. The clergy mentioned the financial crisis the world experienced in 2008-2009 is still being felt. They stated some local churches are doing some very good relief and development work as it relates to widowhood. This is mainly at a local church level. Coordinating their resources could possibly be a game changer for them as they minister to the widows. As a diocese and region they have not developed a financial plan nor considered a strategic plan how to coordinate their efforts to have a more meaningful and lasting impact. In addition, a sustainability plan as part of and/or alongside a financial strategy could go a long way in establishing and maintaining the future ministry of the Anglican Church to widows.

The clergy revealed there are not unique and specific fundraising efforts directed at raising funds apart from casual appeals to assist them in ministering to the widows and their children. The researcher believes employing or acquiring the assistance of a volunteer fundraising specialist to bring in the most funds for this special cause would be key in making the mission of caring for the widow and her dependents more viable and the ministry financially less burdensome. This does not mean individual members will be exempt from financially sponsoring these causes.

### **5.2.2. Non-Government Organisations**

Financial challenges have led several churches to establish organisations alongside the local church Non-Government (and Non-Profit Organisations) as an outgrowth of their practical divinity. This allows them to apply for funding from government departments. Funds are normally made available if the programs of the NGOs share a common interest with government's agenda and do not discriminate on religious, racial, ethnic and political grounds.

Apart from the financial benefit in establishing NGOs, the Church will be better positioned if it aims to work for the common good of all citizens and not only Anglican Church members. Borrowing from Wallis (2014:15), he suggests the Anglican

Church could more aggressively transfer their values, ideas, and loyalty to serve a greater cause of civility. According to Wallis, (cf. p.13) if we do this, our theology will transcend our sociology, as we become Christians with public and not only denominational commitments. In chapter two, the researcher pointed out drawing on Stott (2006) that the church is called to social service and action, as well as relief and development work, which includes advocacy on behalf of the voiceless and powerless. The church is called to work towards both spiritual and social upliftment. The two are integrated and by working towards the common good the Anglican Church can invite, empower, and equip people to live for this greater vision.

### **5.2.3 Writings**

The data also revealed that generally the Anglican Church has spoken out against the marginalisation of the poor, the vulnerable, which in most cases are the widow and orphan. Again, perhaps a more coordinated approach in writing position papers, articles and popular papers on the topic in question, (e.g. columns in the weekly newspaper on widowhood, publications in journals, using civil platforms etc.) and similar social challenges could serve the practical vision of the church well, as it seeks ways to eradicate harmful widowhood practices. In chapter three, Kunhiyop in particular writes and argues that the church should engage government on issues pertaining to legislation.

The Anglican Church has done this well in the past and continues to do so especially through its pastoral care ministry, whilst they assist widows to deal with their grief. The advice of Clinebell (1984) regarding the stages of grief and Rogers (1952) client-centred therapy are heeded. Nonetheless, the researcher is of the view that the intensity regarding the subject in question ought to be increased. One of the best ways to do this is to write and publish relevant papers regularly that address the unique challenges faced by widows and to start a conversation at a broader level where citizens and the Church could dialogue around improved legislation and action. If I am to borrow from John Maxwell (2006) a well-known leadership expert who has served the church over many years, he says, what is talked about normally gets done. Equally, what is written has the carrying capacity to inform and challenge individuals to work towards the common good especially as it relates to the harmful

widowhood practices in Ezeagu. When the Church writes on topics of national interest we creating awareness and hopefully as the [Anglican] church create this awareness people will be moved to action.

#### **5.2.4 Bottom Up Strategies**

Regarding bottom up strategies, the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Methodology would be a useful approach in also creating a platform for widows to become decision-makers and to play a more active role in the initiatives as it relates to widowhood. This is important if widows are to be actors in determining their own destinies. Meyers (1999) supports the AI approach and he articulates it as follow:

- (a) **Discover** - What gives life? The best of what is (appreciating). In this process, they are to be engaged regarding actions in relation to the felt needs and what social services and actions would best meet those needs.
- (b) **Dream** - What could be? What is the situation calling for (envisioning)? Here the Anglican Church can develop a comprehensive strategy and action steps through widow participation (and or community participation) in dreaming together about a possible future for widows.

Community participation or bottom up strategies has become a central theme in (*theological, italics mine*) social and economic development as a way of addressing past inequalities, assisting vulnerable and marginalised groups (Nsanzya 2013:4).

- (c) **Dialogue** - What should be? The ideal (co-constructing). In this actions step the Anglican Church must insist on input from widows to hear their answers to their problems. Literature on participatory and people centred development also shows that there are huge benefits of participation in development projects (humanitarian). Dialogue can be successful when the community (widows) genuinely participate in the process.
- (d) **Delivery:** What is working? How to increase it (sustaining)? In this action step an analyses is done of what is working and how the Anglican Church can

improve on the current services, and partnerships and how it can be more creative in ministering and addressing the plight of the widows.

### **5.2.5 Preaching on Issues Relating to Social Justice**

Various contexts present unique opportunities to preach on topics relating to social, political and ethical issues. A preacher of the Word should be able to preach in different and in challenging contexts. In chapter three Stott (2006) speaks of social services and social action. Bouwers in (Kretzschmar 2009) speaks of challenging the status quo, according to the researcher following on from the authors above developing a preaching strategy to address issues will go a long way in addressing cultural practices that are inconsistent with the Biblical message as widows are treated unfairly and with little human dignity and respect. Through a preaching vision (the long-range perspective), Anglican clergy can ask themselves how can I (we) best develop a heart and vision for social justice as part of congregation and community formation that will exemplify Christ's mission as recorded in Luke 4:18-19. Such an approach will influence the various audiences on some key issues relating to sound widowhood practices.

### **5.2.6 More Evaluated Self-Help Programs**

The researcher did not conduct an audit on the self-help program referred to by the respondents. Based on the feedback received from the research participants, it appears that the programs are much needed, not specifically or exclusively Christian-based, and helpful. The researcher would encourage the Anglican Church to develop its own skills courses and to review courses, which could have a strong humanistic overtone and lack consistency with the Biblical narrative. This does not mean many of the self-programs are not consistent with the Biblical narrative.

### **5.2.7 Strengthening of Partnerships**

The study reveals the Anglican Church has good relationships and is collaborating with several like-minded organisation and institutions on several levels in addressing the felt needs of the widows in Ezeagu. Relationships and collaborating with other organisation and institutions because of human imperfection are fickle. The Anglican Church will do well in strengthening these relationships through regular meetings,

and dialogue by sharing and adopting at a deeper level a common vision. This could result in a coalition. Consideration could be given to signing Memorandums of Understanding (MOU), outlining the joint and individual functions of the various role players. Such practice assists in protecting the interests of various organisations whilst at the same time effectly communicating the shared vision and framework in which it takes place.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The mini-thesis explored the socio-cultural practice of widowhood in Ezeagu, Nigeria. The study found that widows in the research locale experience some harmful practices, which are deeply rooted in cultural understanding of widowhood. Much of these practices are not consistent with the teachings of the Bible. The study further highlights the values, ethics and practices of sound Biblical principles as it relates to widowhood. The study discovered through empirical data that the Anglican Church has very been active in assisting widows through various initiatives and through collaboration with other like-minded organisations. The study concludes by communicating possible theological-strategic-action steps on how the Anglican Church could intensify and better developed its ministry to widows in the research locale.

The researcher recommends the following areas as possible research topics for future research on the themes relating to widowhood practices:

- Establishing to what quantifiable degree harmful widowhood practices impacts each local congregations in the archdeaconry.
- Establishing to what degree the general adjustable strategies communicated by social science are consistent with the integrated counselling models offered by the Anglican Church.
- Evaluating various models of intervention strategies, which could be most helpful in assisting widows to order their personal world after the death of their spouse.

- Promote research towards the establishment of helpful policies or guidelines that could guide the Anglican province, diocese, archdeaconry and local congregations in collaborating with 'secular' organisations.

In conclusion Wesley's (1703-1791) dictum is applicable to this study solitary religion is not an option. In keeping with one of the central biblical passages for Wesley and the church at large, Matthew 22:34-40, social holiness is deep intentional love for neighbour. Stressing either religion or social action, one without the other leads to problems in both directions (Evangelical Gnosticism), and keeping the balance is the task of the church.

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## Appendix A

Dear XXX

Date

I am doing a mini-thesis as part of my **Master of Theology - Pastoral Theology** degree with the **South African Theological Seminary** on *Widowhood Practice in Ezeagu, Nigeria: The Role of the Anglican Church*.

I have permission from my supervisor Pelham Lessing ([pelham@sats.edu.za](mailto:pelham@sats.edu.za) or +27 11 234 4440 or +27 76 140 3404) and the seminary to conduct the envisage empirical research.

I would need to conduct a 30-minute interview on the subject of widowhood, your experience of widowhood and how the Anglican Church assisted you. If you agree to participate, I will send you the interview schedule in advanced but I would love to hear your life story relating to your widowhood experience. I have selected a group of 30-40 potential participants including clergy.

Please can you confirm if you are willing to be part of this study?

Thank you for your time.

**Agubuzu-Oyi Celestina Mgboo**

## Appendix B

<b>Date</b>	
<b>Times</b>	
<b>Location</b>	
<b>Explain</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Study for my degree – SATS</li> <li>2. What will happen to the results</li> <li>3. Confidentiality and Anonymity</li> <li>4. Right to not participate</li> <li>5. Right to comment</li> <li>6. The Final report</li> </ol>

### 1. BACKGROUND

1.1	Age	
1.2	Race	
1.3	Gender	
1.4	Religion	
1.5	When did your spouse pass away?	
1.6	How many children do you have?	
1.7	How many of your children are dependent on you?	

1.8	Are you currently working	
1.9	What is your highest qualification?	
1.10	How would you describe your income? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Below the poverty line</li> <li>- Living Wage</li> <li>- Decent Wage</li> </ul>	
1.11	Are you receiving any government funding? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Old age pension</li> <li>- Disability assistance</li> <li>- Child grant</li> </ul>	

## 2. ASSISTANCE RECEIVED FROM ORGANISATIONS

2.1	What type of assistance did you receive from the Anglican Church
<b>Answer</b>	
2.2	Did you receive any assistance or training from another religious group?
<b>Answer</b>	
2.3	What help, if any, did you receive from family, friends and or neighbours?
<b>Answer</b>	
2.4	What help did you receive from Government organisations or parastatal organisations?
<b>Answer</b>	

2.5	Were you consulted or did you receive counselling prior to receiving assistance from the above-mentioned groups?
<b>Answer</b>	

### 3. ARCHDEACONS INTERVIEWED

3.1	How long have you served as archdeacon?
<b>Answer</b>	
3.2	Are the cultural practices relating to widowhood in Ezeagu [still] followed staunchly?  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Negative: harmful widowhood practices</li> <li>- Positive: the concept of Ubuntu</li> </ul>
<b>Answer</b>	
3.3	What role has the Anglican Church played in addressing some of the negative cultural practices as it relates to widowhood?
<b>Answer</b>	
3.3	What type of material or physical assistance has the Anglican Church provided to widows and children who have been negatively affected by these practices?
<b>Answer</b>	
3.4	In what areas do you think the Anglican Church can improve in ministering more effectively to widows.
<b>Answer</b>	



**4. FINAL QUESTIONS – THESE ARE QUESTIONS THAT MAY ARISE DURING THE INTERVIEW**

4.1	
<b>Answer</b>	
4.2	
<b>Answer</b>	

Thank you very much for the time you have been willing to give me. I appreciate it very much.

I hereby confirm that these interviews will be conducted privately and confidentially and no names will be divulged.

Many thanks,

**Agubuzu-Oyi Celestina Mgboo**